THE WORLD'S GREATEST MUSIC MAGAZINE

Q

The 50 Albums Of The Year

Includes in-depth interviews with:
Angel Olsen, Elbow, Aldous Harding,
The Murder Capital, Oh Sees

Michael Kiwanuka

Presents:
The deep cuts behind his new classic album

+ The Music That Influenced 2019's Best LPs:

Playlists curated and annotated by:
Sharon Van Etten
Sleaford Mods
Weyes Blood
Vampire Weekend
Fat White Family...

"I'm Not Frodo"
Coldplay
Exclusive!
Chris Martin's true confessions

nonesuch

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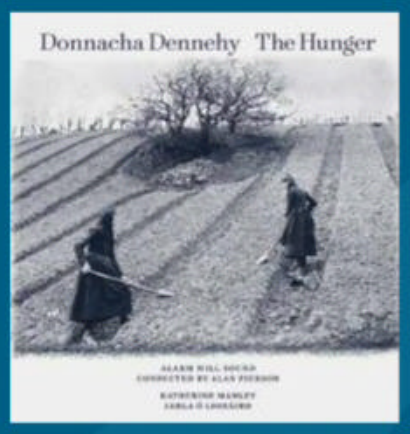

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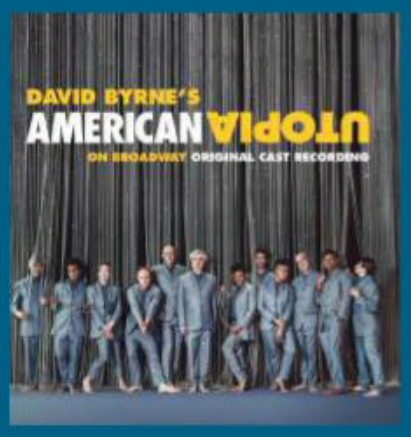

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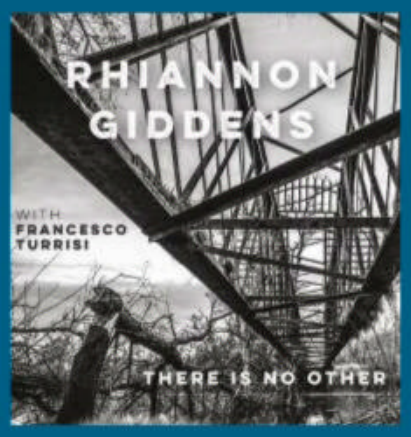
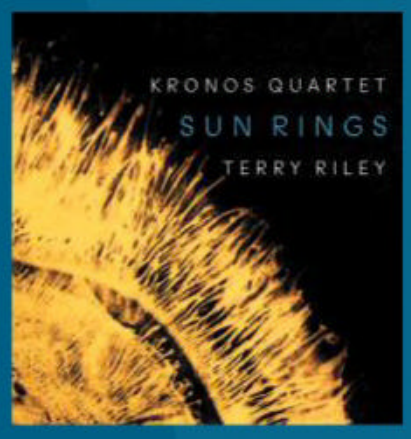
AMERICAN UTOPIA ON BROADWAY



RHIANNON GIDDENS WITH FRANCESCO TURRISI
THERE IS NO OTHER



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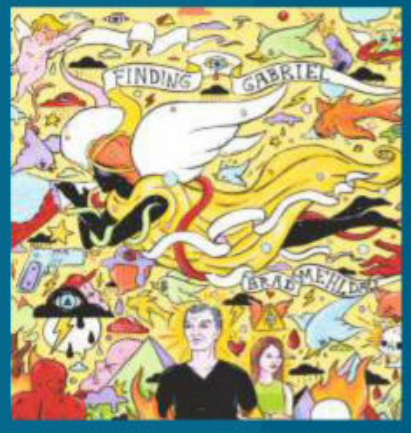

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FINDING GABRIEL

GABY MORENO & VAN DYKE PARKS
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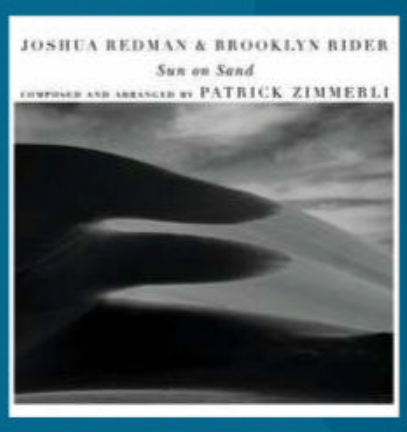
MANDY PATINKIN
CHILDREN AND ART

RACHAEL & VILRAY
RACHAEL & VILRAY



JOSHUA REDMAN & BROOKLYN RIDER
SUN ON SAND

CAROLINE SHAW & ATTACCA QUARTET
ORANGE

VAGABON
VAGABON

YOLA
WALK THROUGH FIRE

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COVER AND THIS PAGE: ALEX LAKE

Backstage...

Growing up – and by growing up I mean the period between nine years old and 24 – there were two days of the week that I looked most forward to: Saturday, because that meant football. And Wednesday, because that was the day I got my copy of NME. All I cared about, really, was football and music, plus all associated activities.

And the issue of NME I looked forward to the most was the end of year issue because that had the albums of the year in it. It meant I could check that The Jam/Smiths/Fall/Happy Mondays had cleaned up as expected, that all was right with the world, but it also suggested to me the one unheard-of album I should buy. It was the end of the year. I'd saved up for that album. It mattered.

Now, as an old duffer, I can report that very little has changed. It's still football and music (and sometimes my children), and it's still the end of year issue that I most look forward to. Compiling the 50 albums of the year list is such a joy. Happily, it reinforces the idea that our writers know their stuff, now perhaps more than ever. It reminds me, too, to revisit stuff from earlier in the year. I get to pick out interesting artists from it for interview pieces. The whole shebang. It's the best. They'll have to carry me out of here.

This year, we've added an element that I feel elevates it by having a selection of artists discuss some of the records that influenced their own creations: another musical wormhole to fall down. The idea was inspired by Michael Kiwanuka's kind offer to compile a CD of the songs behind his epic Kiwanuka album for us, which you can find stuck to the cover if you've picked up a copy in the UK. It's a cracker that's been on the office stereo constantly since we took delivery.

The great British music man, Jeff Barrett of Heavenly Records, once defined cool by saying it was when you shared the names of good records and books with those who may enjoy it. Somehow, I missed Carwyn Ellis & Rio 18's astonishing, brilliant mix of sweet Welsh harmonies and Brazilian rhythms on Joia! when it came out in July. I've now discovered it too late to wedge into the albums of the year without capsizing another deserving artist (plus, I can't fix it!), so it's my Christmas gift to you if you haven't heard it already. I can't recommend it enough.

See you next year. This issue will keep you warm until then, hopefully.

Ted Kessler, Editor, Q Magazine.

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[...And their album of the year...]

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Q is published by H Bauer Publishing. Printed in the UK by Southern Print. Distribution by Frontline Ltd.

Q magazine ISSN 0955 4955, (USPS 11278) is published 13 times a year by H Bauer Publishing.
The US annual subscription price is $119.90. Airfreight and mailing in the USA by agent named WN Shipping USA, 156 15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.
Periodicals postage paid at Jamaica NY 11431.
US Postmaster: Send address changes to Q magazine, WN Shipping USA, 156 15, 146th Avenue, 2nd Floor, Jamaica, NY 11434, USA.
Subscription records are maintained at Bauer Media, Subscriptions, CDS Global, Tower House, Sovereign Park, Lathkill Street, Market Harborough, Leicester LE16 9EF, United Kingdom.
Air Business Ltd is acting as our mailing agent.

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MARCO VITTUR

RICHARD DAWSON

2020

THE MOST BRILLIANT AND HUMANE SONGWRITER WORKING TODAY
THE GUARDIAN

UNLIKE ANY ALBUM YOU'VE EVER HEARD
SUNDAY TIMES

2020 IS FUNNY, FREAKY AND UNEXPECTEDLY MELODIC
AS WELL AS DESPERATELY MOVING
THE OBSERVER

YOU'LL LIKELY NOT HEAR A MORE SINGULAR
OR, INDEED, BETTER RECORD THIS YEAR
THE QUIETUS

★★★★★
THE GUARDIAN

★★★★★
RECORD COLLECTOR

★★★★★
EVENING STANDARD

★★★★★
THE SKINNY

★★★★★
LOUD AND QUIET

★★★★★
UNCUT

★★★★
FINANCIAL TIMES

Domino

INCOMING

NEW ADVENTURES IN MUSIC...

In which we locate synth-pop star Caroline Polachek, defy expectations with JPEGMafia and nibble gnocchi with King Princess.

The machine men: Kraftwerk bring their 3D 50th-anniversary extravaganza to All Points East, 2020.

First Look

KRAFTWERK AND TAME IMPALA ANNOUNCED FOR ALL POINTS EAST 2020

The festival unveils two big headliners for next year.

Kraftwerk and Tame Impala have been announced as the first headliners for All Points East 2020. The German electronic pioneers will play at the festival on Friday, 29 May, with the Australian psych-rockers appearing the weekend before, on Saturday, 23 May. The festival takes place at Victoria Park in East London.

Both shows are UK exclusives. Kraftwerk's appearance will coincide with their 50th anniversary, the band formed by Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider in Düsseldorf, Germany, in 1970. They will be bringing their innovative 3D show to Victoria Park, combining digital surround sound with cutting-edge animations and robotics. Joining them on the bill on 29 May will be Iggy Pop, Johnny Marr, The Orb, Chromatics, Anna Calvi, Kim Gordon, Grandmaster Flash, Jehnny Beth and John Maus, with more to be announced.

Tame Impala will also be joined by a host of names the weekend before. Joining Kevin Parker's band, who release their new album The Slow Rush in February, on the bill are Caribou, Glass Animals, Whitney, Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever and Holy Fuck, with more names to come in 2020.

This year's festival will also see the return of In The Neighbourhood, a four-day midweek event hosting a programme of activities and entertainment in collaboration with the local community and businesses. The schedule for In The Neighbourhood will be announced soon.

Tickets for both the Kraftwerk and Tame Impala days are available now from www.allpointseastfestival.com.

Race against the clock: Caroline Polachek preps for her Radio 1 appearance in London.

“I’m boycotting Disney remakes on principle. Kids deserve new stories.”

Where Are You Right Now?

CAROLINE POLACHEK

The former Chairlift singer and synth-pop star on why she’s waiting for Matty Healy to get in touch.

Hello, Caroline, where are you right now?
Right now, I am in London. I just finished my first tour on this album and I’m back here for a couple of days of promo.
Where do you like to stay when you’re in London?
I’m staying at my boyfriend’s place, which is in Notting Hill. It’s right next to Kensington Gardens which is amazing this time of year.
Have you ever been to Carnival?
No! I’ve never been here during Carnival, I’d love to be. I’ve heard it’s absolutely mental.
Do you have any phobias?
I’ve got this phobia of dry terry towels ever touching my teeth. Besides that, just death generally.
Is dry terry towels coming close to your teeth a threat that rears its head often in your line of work?
No, but once in a while I just look at the thing and go, “Oh God! Imagine that touching my teeth!”
When did you first come to the UK?
Actually, coming to London was one of my first memories ever as a child. I grew up in Japan but my parents brought me here on vacation when I was probably like three or four years old. I remember going to the Natural History Museum and looking at this huge animatronic dinosaur. I remember thinking that the way that the dinosaur moved was because it was full of marionette puppeteers inside of it making it move and that idea was terrifying to me at the time.
What’s your favourite Disney film?
I think the late-’80s, early-’90s pocket was my favourite, like Little Mermaid, Aladdin, The Lion King, those three are probably my favourites.
Have you seen any of the new remakes?
No, I’m boycotting them on principle. I think kids deserve new stories. The old ones were made so perfectly they don’t need millions and millions of dollars to be remade, let’s make new ones.
Whose idea was it for you to dress up like a pirate in the video for Ocean Of Tears?
I went on the Pirates Of The Caribbean ride at Disneyland with *[PC Music producer]* AG Cook and a couple of friends. I turned to Matt Copson, who was on the ride with me, who co-directed the video and said, “Would it be obvious to do a pirate video?” Matt was like, “You just *have* to do it...”
Who is on your collaborations wishlist that you haven’t worked with yet?
I would love to work with Matty Healy from The 1975.
Matty was in Q last month, he might be reading this...
Great! You guys can take the A&R credit too. Q would technically have exec-produced that collab as well. You’ll be up there accepting the Grammy.
I’ll let you know what our cut is.
Who’s the most famous person in your phone contacts?
Oh, I’m not going to gossip – come on!
Alright then, have you ever pocket dialled one of your musical heroes?
I did it the other day. I was at the airport and I looked down to see I was butt-dialling M83 who I haven’t spoken to in years so I’m sorry, Anthony *[Gonzalez]* about that call.
What will you be doing in 20 minutes’ time?
I’m going to be on my laptop finishing up an instrumental production of a cover of Missing by Everything But The Girl which I’m about to perform on BBC Radio 1 today. I was up till 3am working on this instrumental and I woke up and listened to it and it’s not done so I’ve got two more hours before I go on air, so I will be tweaking it.
Good luck!
Thank you so much. Cheers!
CHRIS CATCHPOLE

★★★★★ ROLLING STONE

★★★★★ DAILY STAR

★★★★★ TIMES

★★★★★ DAILY MAIL

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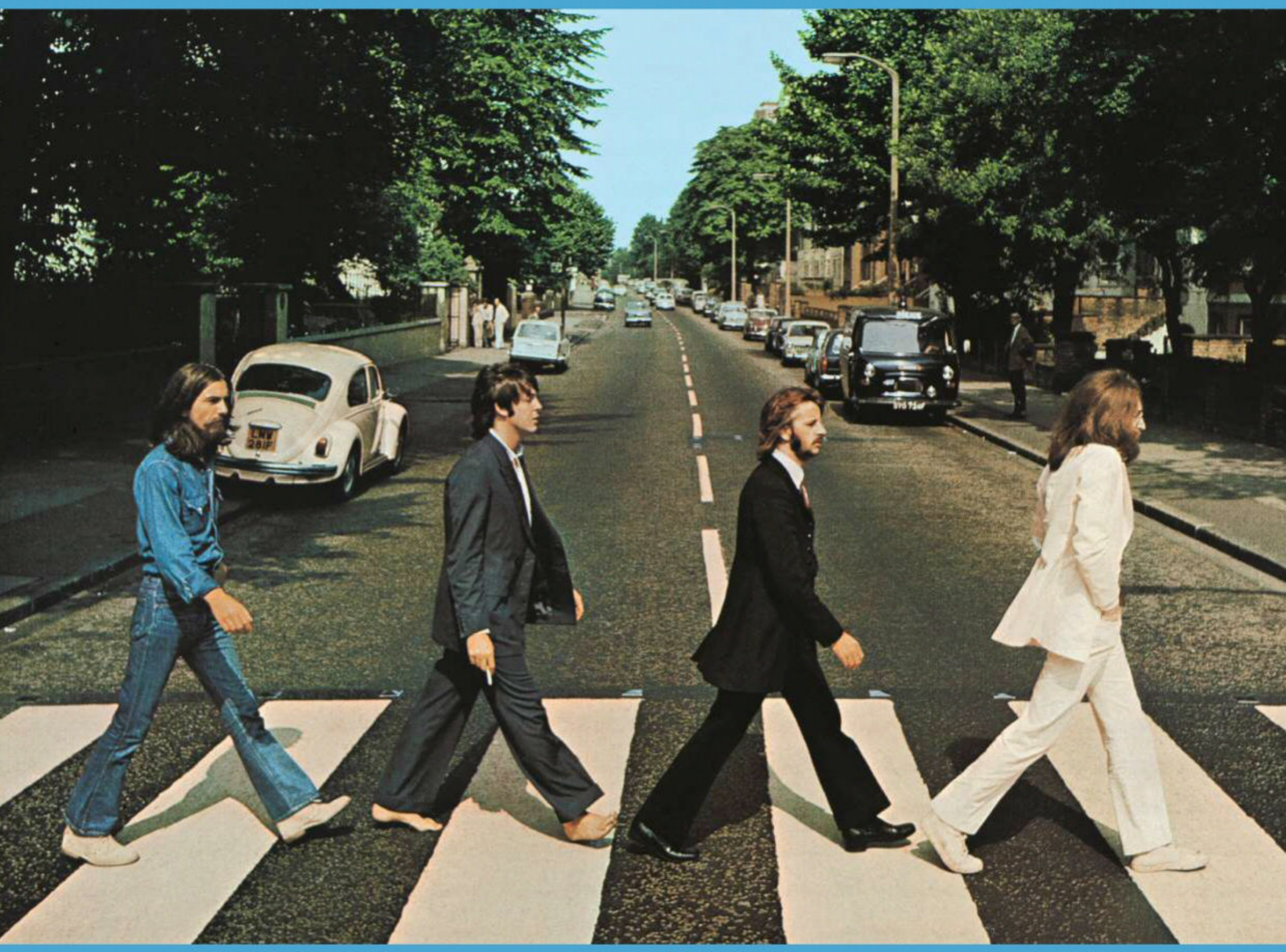

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Breaking

JPEGMAFIA

US Air Force vet's expectation-confounding hip-hop meshes militant politics and "cornball" introspection.

Rules are for squares, right? That's certainly the ethos of rapper JPEGMafia, aka Barrington Hendricks, who walks into New River Studios in North London sporting a dangly Father Christmas earring, his purple hoodie augmented by another hoodie draped over his arm. When asked what he'd like to drink he orders a red wine and a large hot chocolate chaser. "Weird shit," he says, correctly. It's apt then that the previous night he met fellow rule-breaker, Björk. "It was terrifying," he says, his croaky accent clinging to his New York roots. "She's done so much shit I didn't know how to speak to someone like that."

Hedricks, 30, shares a similarly genre-agnostic attitude to his Icelandic idol. His latest album, All My Heroes Are Cornballs, pinballs between ferocious outsider rap, politicised punk, outsider folk and a cover of TLC's No Scrubs. It's a reflection of the catch-all attitude to music he's had since growing up in Brooklyn as a "weird alt-black kid", listening to a mixture of NYC rapper Cam'ron and "Britney Spears and shit." At the age of 13, however, his family moved to Alabama, a jarring cultural switch that changed everything. "I had to deal with racism and with adult situations very quickly," he says. "It made me more hostile."

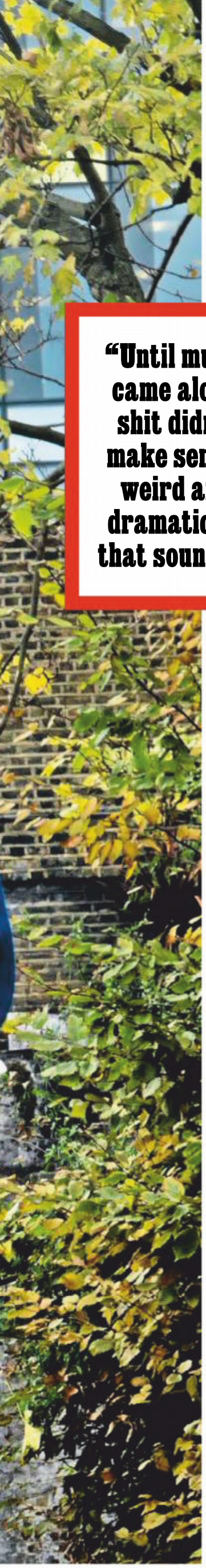
At the age of 18, he joined the army, serving a term in the US Air Force that saw him deployed in Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, North Africa and Japan. While it only

Quite the contrary: the "genre-agnostic" JPEGMafia, aka Barrington Hendricks.

Get This Track:
Beta Male Strategies

For Fans Of:
Danny Brown, Death Grips, Brockhampton

CLAIRE BOGLE



"Until music came along shit didn't make sense, weird and dramatic as that sounds."

magnetised his experiences in Alabama, he escaped by making beats. "I'd already been making music but when I realised I was going to be in a situation that was really hard for me to do it, it made me want to do it even more," he says. In fact, music has always been a coping mechanism. "Until music came along shit didn't really make sense," he says, "as weird and dramatic as that sounds."

For a long time he kept his musical aspirations hidden, unbothered by the opinions of "Steve from Buttfuck, Idaho." It was when Hendricks moved to Baltimore that JPEGMafia was born, with the city's righteous anger following the death of Freddie Gray in police custody inspiring 2015 EP, Darkskin Manson. That tension also boiled over into 2018's breakthrough second album Veteran, a radical state-of-the-nation address that touched on everything from anime to Trump adviser Kellyanne Conway. He has a clear idea as to why that album connected. "The way I presented it was in an angry way, not in a subservient way because I don't vibe with that shit," he says, comparing his approach to Ice Cube's early knack for attacking political things from a down to earth perspective.

Aware he was in danger of painting himself into a corner, with people expecting his follow-up to just be "louder and more abrasive", All My Heroes Are Cornballs also takes an introspective turn. It shows him to be as flawed as the titular cornballs. "I'm just pointing that antagonistic finger at myself," he says. Talk of complex heroes leads to one his favourite subjects, Batman, who he has tattooed on his arm. Unsurprisingly, he fosters some fairly controversial views about the caped crusader. "Ben Affleck was the best Batman," he says. "Honestly. Christian Bale was cool but it's just him in a mask, but with Ben Affleck I was like, 'Oh, that's Batman.'" And with that he's off, happy to be side-stepping expectations at every turn. *MICHAEL CRAGG*

ON THE STEREO

Back in black: Savages' Jehnny Beth strikes out alone.

THE TUNES ON REPEAT IN THE Q OFFICE THIS MONTH.

KEELEY FORSYTH
START AGAIN

The second single from Manchester musician and actor Keeley Forsyth starts off like it's about to break into The Cure's A Forest before heading down its own overgrown path. Promises great things for her solo debut, out next month.
Out: now, on The Leaf Label.

BAXTER DURY
SLUMLORD

British music's most entertaining cynic injects his orchestral-laden funk-pop with a loose disco groove on this comeback single, the scowling vocal delivery of 2017's Prince Of Tears replaced with a sort of louche bemusement.
Out: now, on Le Label.

SQUAREPUSHER
VORTRACK

The first taster from Tom Jenkinson's new album, Be Up A Hello, out in January, is a typically frenetic slab of digital mayhem that's both eerily unsettling and strangely compelling at the same time.
Out: now, on Warp.

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB
EVERYTHING ELSE HAS GONE WRONG

The London quartet took five years off after their last record. They sound like the break did them good on this new single, a jubilant indie-pop anthem from their forthcoming fifth record.
Out: now, on mmm... Records.

TAME IMPALA
BREATHE DEEPER

An album track that sums up Kevin Parker's approach on the brilliant new Tame Impala record, fusing spacey synths, throbbing house pianos and shuffling beats with the frontman's dreamy melodies.
Out: 14 February, on Fiction.

CORNERSHOP
NO ROCK: SAVE IN ROLL

Their latest album may be a tribute to the Black Country, but this new single gets its kicks from a few hundred miles to the south, a strong T. Rex influence evident in Tjinder Singh's Marc Bolan-style vocals and the swaggering glam-rock riffs.
Out: now, on Ample Play.

MURA MASA FEAT. SLOWTHAI
DEAL WIV IT

After taking the controls on slowthai's barnstorming Doorman earlier this year, producer Mura Masa calls in the favour on this highpoint from his own forthcoming album, featuring a typically gobby performance from the Northampton rapper over tight, LCD-like funk.
Out: now, on Polydor.

JAMES MASSIAH
NATURAL BORN KILLERS (RIDE FOR ME)

The South London poet sets out his stall with his debut EP, a mutant electro/dancehall banger which finds him talk-rapping lustily over stuttering beats and glacial, twinkling synths.
Out: now, on Levels.

DESTROYER
IT JUST DOESN'T HAPPEN

On the surface, the second teaser track from Dan Bejar's new album, Have We Met, is a smooth dollop of shimmering AOR pop. Within its nocturnal groove, though, lurks a creeping sense of dread.
Out: now, on Dead Oceans.

JEHNNY BETH
I'M THE MAN

Savages' Jehnny Beth sounds like she's having a ball on this solo single, her Elvis-gone-industrial vocal conducting a rush of pounding drums and barbed guitars. The song's Bond theme-style interlude hints at the other directions her solo work might take.
Out: now, on Jehnny Beth.

PAMELA COCHRANE

By royal appointment: King Princess, aka Mikaela Straus, picks out the kale, Blixen, London, 2019.

OUT TO LUNCH WITH...

KING PRINCESS

The rising queer pop star from New York has the appetite for success, if not her gnocchi.

It's unfortunate, given the circumstances of Q's meeting with King Princess, that she really doesn't feel like lunch. Last night, she played at Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, her latest encounter with "the awesome drunk motherfuckers" of Europe; today the multi-faceted singer-songwriter – real name Mikaela Mullaney Straus – is feeling fragile, her need to buy a ChapStick way more pressing than her need for food. Wrapped in baby blue corduroy, holding a pale green juice that matches her hungover aura, the 20-year-old native New Yorker gamely orders gnocchi with kale from the menu at Blixen, a grand greenhouse of a café at the margin of Old Spitalfields Market, even though her heart clearly isn't in it.

It is, however, all over her fine debut Cheap Queen, broken into pieces, crushed underfoot, taped together. The first album released on Mark Ronson's Zelig label, it's the lusciously melancholy product of "a really intense year" romantically and professionally: not only did she "fall in love and get broken up with", her Patricia Highsmith-influenced single 1950 went viral when Harry Styles Twitter-quoted its lyrics. The release of Talia and Pussy Is God only accelerated her profile as a new hero of queer pop. Just before this trip, she performed in the conservative US south – "where I play shows is a haven for gay people, it's very church-like and private" – a visit that inevitably leads to conversation about the parlous state of global politics. "Obviously it's incited a lot of hate and prejudice but it's given people a reason to care about shit they wouldn't have cared about, because it's so heinous. That guy with the fucked-up hair – Boris Johnson. What's wrong with him? He should get a haircut. He has no fucking eyebrows. It's like Trump – you wonder how the average person could relate to that person at all."

"Where I play shows is a haven for gay people."

Straus now lives in Los Angeles, backdrop for break-up and album, yet she acknowledges the impact growing up in New York has had on her. It's where her father owns Brooklyn's Mission Studios and where, a couple of years ago, her mother was arrested at a demonstration at Trump Tower. "My mum got really motivated, especially after I came out, to go out and make a difference. She's fierce." By 14, Straus was travelling all over the city, meeting musicians and producers with her parents' blessing. "They let me go to all these men's houses to make music, but if I wanted to go to a party they would be, 'You're not fucking going.' They knew it was my job." She didn't, she says, have much of a social life as a teenager.

"No one would hang out with me. I was opinionated and loud but also into weird shit, listening to rock music, playing guitar. I was also gay. I went to private school, so people were pretty brutal." Then she tells a real fairytale of New York. She was on the subway with her friend when "this old French man started hitting on us. I said, 'We're gay' and it just made him want us more. So he chased us down into the subway and we're freaking out. And then the train comes and we run on to the car and the door shuts – and it's a car full of drag queens. Filled to the brim with beautiful, beautiful drag queens. And we were safe." She leans back in her leather banquette, visibly moved. "That's New York. You're safe in the hands of the communities that raised you."

Even under the weather, Straus is vivid company, old-fashioned silver-screen charisma behind her modern edge. Kale finally discarded ("I'm really not picky, just hungover"), she's free to discuss her path through music and queer culture, from Radclyffe Hall and Liza Minnelli to Divine and Madonna. "Seventies rock legends were always so fascinating to me; the Robert Plants, the Marc Bolans. Prince is huge for me; Freddie Mercury is huge for me. Elton John. I think it's just that what a pop star meant when I was a kid was to be a beautiful woman and I think a rock star meant to be a beautiful person. And I didn't necessarily identify as a woman or relate to femininity."

Cheap Queen, she says, is a character she developed who "really got me through. RuPaul says drag isn't becoming someone else, it's becoming yourself. It's true." Who is the album for? "For whoever needs it." Like a subway car full of drag queens, King Princess wants to be the cavalry: fragile today maybe, but a full-strength pop star tomorrow.

VICTORIA SEGAL

Favourite restaurant?
"Carbone in New York."
Most hated foodstuff?
"Asparagus."
Favourite hangover cure?
"Sleeping and assorted soups."

NYC food versus LA food?
"New York's fierce – the best food. LA – it's good food but its more bougie and you can't just walk down the street and find a great place. New York's got all these secret spots."

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Green is good: Joe Thornalley, aka Vegyn.

Breaking

VEGYN

Get lost in the London-based Frank Ocean collaborator's head-spinning soundworld.

Before the edit suites, vocal dissections and all-nighters burning through knackered laptops, Joe Thornalley found escapism in Dungeons & Dragons. The role-playing game, he speculates, provided an illusion of control as modern life spun him into freefall, much like music-making does now. "We've got the same brains that we did in the medieval ages, when you would maybe meet 100 people," the beatmaker elaborates, sipping coffee in a Hackney café. "And now, with that same brain, you're supposed to deal with thousands – even just on the Tube. It's a lot to take in."

The introspective 25-year-old is now courting a rapidly expanding audience of his own. Blending fantastical hip-hop and homebody club music, his career as Vegyn abounds with contradictions. A self-described loner based in North London, he's become a renowned collaborator synonymous with the languid sounds of West Coast chill. He channels paranoia into hyperactive songs that are somehow homely, a refuge from today's hyper-connectivity. And he's an electronic producer who, by his own admission, finds dance music a bit dull.

"I actually grew up listening to Radio 2," he explains, smiling. "My dad's a huge Todd Rundgren fan, so that filters into my music. He's not into quote-unquote 'cool stuff'. He's like, 'Where's the hook?!'" His father, it later transpires, is Phil Thornalley, a veteran hitmaker and producer of The Cure's Pornography.

"I like endlessly pulling the rug from under people."

A "sensitive, awkward kid", Thornalley reinvented himself during an art course and founded the record label PLZ Make It Ruins. But it was Frank Ocean, enlisting him for 2016 opus Blonde, that springboarded Vegyn from aimless tinkerer to A-list curiosity. "Unfortunately, money equals freedom," Vegyn admits of the boost. "That's fucking sad, but with money, you can essentially do whatever you want. You can commit crimes and get away with it!"

Another perk of Ocean's patronage was a gig co-hosting his Beats 1 radio show. Collaborating on the playlists complemented Vegyn's broadening horizons. In the mid-2000s, he discovered electronic music at "objectively the worst possible time," particularly for "Americanised dubstep." Despite co-running a club night in his teens (and later meeting Ocean and James Blake at Shoreditch club Plastic People), he "fucking hated throwing parties" because he "never had any friends to bring along." His own, playful songs broker peace with a genre he believes has "swerved into either hyper-irony or hyper-self-seriousness. I'm a goofy guy!"

On debut album Only Diamonds Cut Diamonds, guests range from rapper Freddie Gibbs to violinist Owen Pallett. "I like endlessly pulling the rug from under people," Vegyn says. "A lot of my songs just peter out. It's not satisfying, but sometimes that's the point." What does his hook-loving dad make of this? "He's like, 'This could be so cool – let me put a vocal on it!'" he laughs. It's one more voice to tune out on his journey down the rabbit hole. *JAZZ MONROE*

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Cash For Questions

THE STARS! PROBED!! BY YOU!!!

This Month: Underworld

WORDS: **CHRIS CATCHPOLE** PHOTOGRAPHS: **MARCO VITTUR**

The dance icons on hanging with Iggy Pop, soundtracking the Olympics and why Brian Eno deserves his own comedy show.

A large pig shed in the middle of a field in Essex isn't an obvious crucible for some of the most innovative and uplifting electronic music of our times, but that's precisely where Underworld have set up home for the past decade. It's here that they've worked on projects as diverse as the music for the 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony and the hugely ambitious Drift Series – a mammoth undertaking that saw Karl Hyde and Rick Smith write, record and release tracks and videos once a week for an entire year. Far from being a slog, though, Drift has given the dance duo a new creative lease of life almost unparalleled in their 40-year career. As they settle into their HQ on a wet and windy November morning, Rick Smith is already talking about the plans for Drift Series 2, which he wants to get cracking on "any day soon."

"Oh shit," jokes Karl Hyde, who looks so youthful for a man in his 60s you scan the room for some sort of Dorian Gray-style portrait. "There will definitely be another series – this is what we do now." Before that, however, there's the small matter of answering the questions from interrogative Q readers.

Were there any points during the making of Drift where you thought, "Fuck, I wish we hadn't started this..."?
Manish Khan, via Q Mail
Rick Smith: Absolutely, yes. At many points.
Karl Hyde: It was a stimulating and inspiring idea from Rick and there was a sense of commitment. Once you've committed to it in public you can't really back out. Which has its downsides but it also has its upsides as well. On those days when you want to back out, you can't.
RS: When you set out, there was a lot that was romantic in the nicest way about it. You focus on that, setting out on a journey, a nomad, you don't know where you're going, you're full of beans. When you've been walking for seven weeks maybe it's not quite so exciting and you're thinking more about the state of your feet.

You're both ridiculously lean older gentlemen. I'm the same age but much plumper. What's your secret? Is it protein-based? Fitness regimes? What?
Ian McCann, Shrewsbury
RS: *[To Karl]* Go on, tell them everything!
KH: I'd start by saying, "What pub are you drinking in?"
RS: Ridiculously lean. I feel very flattered.
KH: I feel very flattened.
RS: The hardest thing is the two worlds that we spend a lot of time in, one is a studio world and looking after yourself when you're working in a cave when the pressure is on isn't very healthy. And the other is being on tour, which can go to real extremes. You can be overeating because the food in front of you is so interesting or there's never the food you need to eat when you want it because you've only had three hours' sleep and you haven't got time for breakfast. For Karl, obviously, fitness is a whole different thing. All I have to do is just make sure I don't fall over.
KH: That's definitely a winner – don't fall over. It's just living life moderately and realising that one day you're going to look really shit on camera if you eat too much cake.

Could you tell us something surprising about Iggy Pop?
Neil Heathers, via Q Mail
KH: There's nothing surprising you could say about Iggy Pop.

»

"Cream tea with Iggy and Irvine Welsh was a moment where I had a second of thinking, 'This is fucking weird.' Particularly with these little three-tier sandwiches and cakes." Karl Hyde

"Shall I be mother?": Karl and Rick enjoy a rock summit in Miami with Iggy Pop (left) and Irvine Welsh (right), May, 2018.

ROB BAKER ASHTON

“Beaucoup questions!”: Underworld’s Karl Hyde (left) and Rick Smith in their studio, Essex, 25 November, 2019.

Cash For Questions

Lean on me: Smith and Danny Boyle, with whom he collaborated on the 2012 Olympics Opening Ceremony.

RS: He is the embodiment of surprise. He's an extraordinary man.
KH: It was kind of things that we knew about him – well-read, incredible memory, a capacity for improvisation that is unsurpassed in my experience. Just watching him improv with things, I'd never come across anything like it. And a really nice bloke.
RS: I haven't got a bad or odd, weird or negative memory of any interaction with him whatsoever. Not one. Inspiring.
KH: The weirdest moment was the cream tea with us, Iggy and Irvine Welsh *[for Q's cover story in 2018]*. That was a moment where I had a split second of thinking, "This is fucking weird." Particularly with these little three-tier sandwiches and cakes.

In your song STAR you namecheck various stars, including Mickey Mouse, John Peel, David Beckham, Michael Caine and Dr Dre, and rhyme the next line with their surname. Was there anyone you tried to get in who didn't work?
Danielle Murphy, Islington
KH: Muhammad Ali. That was so hard. With STAR we've been sending film crews to different cities and asking people who their stars are and then writing a verse based on that. It's been really interesting. In South America there were some extraordinary pop stars, film stars, iconic people – wow, there are some phonetics in those names! *[Spanish singer]* Paloma San Basilio was definitely one of them. You might think that's got a lovely rhythm to it, but try putting it to a 4/4 beat!

When was the last time you went out proper, all-night raving?
Simon Jones, Ipswich
RS: Define raving. I had to do a lot of all-night raving to get through Drift. In the middle of the night going, "Oh shit! I need to rave! I need to rave! I must rave! Music must happen for the rave!" We've had a few shows this year that have been late but no, it's been a while. All-night raving, it's been a while, *come on*.

"During the Olympics, something happened with the spirit of the country. Not flag-wavy, it was just people being a community. That latent spirit was woken." Karl Hyde

Who would you be if you went on Stars In Their Eyes?
Charlie Alderly, Cheshunt
RS: Oh! Tonight Matthew, I'm Going To Be Underworld... *[the working title for 1999's Beaucoup Fish]*. Aston Villa. My dad would like that.
KH: I'd be Cardiff then.
RS: That was a great title, it made us smile. Beaucoup Fish is a pretty good title though. It's just as daft.
KH: Often titles will come back from things that Rick has said, like when you said your nephew was the second toughest in the infants. A lot of the time the titles come from Rick, like Born Slippy.

Kelly's heroes: unlikely album title inspiration, Stars In Their Eyes.

Karl, why do you always favour a Breton striped shirt onstage?
Mark Jupp, Lewis
KH: They're singling me out now.
RS: Good! This is going well.
KH: There's a couple of things. I became obsessed in my teens with parallel lines which is why I wear a certain brand of trainer and also as a little kid because I drew a lot, so people used to say, "He's a right little Picasso" and the two things just went together. If you see pictures of me at 11 or 12 years old I was wearing stripes back then. It's like fungus, it just grows on me.

On a scale of one to 10, how brainy is Brian Eno?
MT Kearnes, via Q Mail
RS: He's up there on the brainy scale, surely.
KH: He's a really good talker. And very funny, which a lot of people don't know. He should do more live shows because his banter between tracks is funny as shit. He's a bright guy but his humour is excellent. I think the Brian Eno comedy hour is what you'd want to see.

Your first two albums, Underneath The Radar and Change The Weather, were a drastically different sound. Do you still consider them to be part of your back catalogue?
Thom Needs, via Q Mail
RS: In one sense, yeah, absolutely. That's part of our catalogue, our life. I attach music to a time and a place, memories and people, and there are aspects of that time in terms of being in a band that I don't have good memories of. The '80s was a difficult time for me.
KH: We learnt a lot in the '80s that stood us in good stead for the years that followed. We learnt that some routes were not for us. I'm not sure that we would have survived in the '90s, I think it would have polished us off, if we hadn't had those experiences.

Karl, what was it like working in Paisley Park in the '80s?
Hannah Gosling, via Q Mail
KH: Gosh. It's a bit of car crash of emotions

“You starting?”: Smith and Hyde get pointed in the wilds of Essex, 2019.

here because it was a time and place thing again. If I talk about the legend of it, it’s discounting the fact that we were apart, I was unsure about where things were going, I was a bit messed up in my head. I was drinking horribly and it was a very dark time for me, but then you talk about the legend... Prince was putting together The New Power Generation and rehearsing in the room next door. I met The JB’s and Sheila E. All of that becomes “Oh hey woo-hoo!” Fortunately I had a very good friend called Andrew Flashman who looked after me – he literally saved my life one night – and thankfully I came home and saw a bit of common sense.

Is there a film that you wish you’d scored?
Neil Underhay, Staines

KH: Sunshine! *[Underworld worked on the score with Danny Boyle and John Murphy]*
RS: *[To Karl]* Get out!
KH: The thing is with a film and a score when it’s blown you away the last thing you’d want to do is change it.
RS: Like Taxi Driver, how are you going to try and change that? I’ve been asked to remix amazing records at various points and I’m not really interested. When it’s that amazing... no, no, no.

How much do you think Britain has changed since you did the Opening Ceremony for the Olympics in 2012? How would you soundtrack Britain in 2019?
Sarah Penney, via Q Mail

RS: Everything keeps changing all the time, everywhere, everything, every person. That implies things are better or they’re worse. Things are what they are. Today is today. It’s a better day for some people on the planet and it’s a worse day for other poor souls. We’re all just trying to carry on.
KH: For me, because Rick was the one who was in the centre of the Olympics music, what shocked me in an uplifting way was that as a kid I’d been told about this spirit that had existed in times of crisis in our country when we were being bombed out and communities came together. I’d never seen that in our country. It had either gone or somebody was making it up. And the closest I can think to witnessing that was during the Olympics, something happened with the spirit of the country. Not flag-wavy, it was just people being a community and helping each other and I thought, “Oh, *there* you are.” That latent spirit was woken up during the Olympics.
RS: It’s there all the time, people getting on with their lives, helping each other in profoundly inspiring ways and important ways. But it was amplified by the event. The event brought focus to something that is there all the time and it hasn’t gone away and it doesn’t go away. Frank Cottrell-Boyce and Danny *[Boyle]*, at the heart of it, wanted to celebrate people. »

SHUTTERSTOCK, GETTY

Cash For Questions

I'm coming round for tea tonight, what are we having?
Henry Pleasants, Croydon
RS: Fish finger sandwiches.
KH: What are you cooking?

Have you ever been to the Beaucoup Fish restaurant in Brussels? If so, what would you recommend and do you get freebies?
Huw Roberts, via Q Mail
KH: Many times. Every time we're in Brussels with any time, we go and eat there, it's bloody amazing. It's extraordinary. There's a beautiful story of how it came about. The guy who runs it worked in the city, made a lot of money but was very unhappy. He always dreamt of being a chef, he loved cooking. He was a huge Underworld fan and he had this dream of a restaurant called Beaucoup Fish. So he left the city, people thought he was bonkers, but he followed his dream. And it's done really well. The staff are great, the cooking is always fantastic. The love and care that goes into everything they do is so inspiring. Whenever we go, he's so grateful that we turn up and we're so grateful for what he does. I'm not just praising it vying for a free dinner. Honest.

If you had to compete in one Olympic sport, what would you pick?
Phil Richards, Colchester
RS: Welding. I'd be part of the Welsh Olympic Welding Team. I know bugger-all about welding but it would be a good reason to become an expert, representing my country in the Olympics. Very useful skills. We'd look into the drift *[motorsport]* community for help.

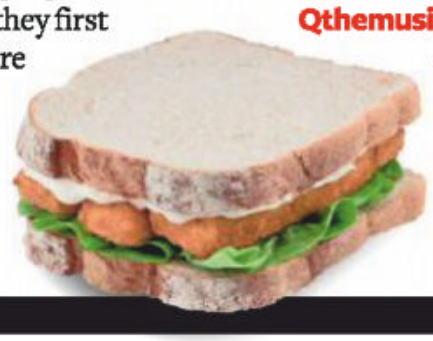
Rick, what's the one bit of gear you couldn't live without?
Diane Poole, Peterborough
RS: My computer. My laptop. You can do amazing things with just a laptop. Ashley *[Burchett, aka Underworld collaborator Ø [Phase]]* made me remember that. There's a piece of software called Logic that we've been using for ever. Everybody buys all this extra software to add to it but Ashley is hardcore. He uses the basics and pulls these incredible sounds out of it. It is so important to master the simplest versions of things. Inspiration and spirit is far more vital in songwriting than the equipment you use.

Karl, whatever happened to the record you were making with Yannis from Foals?
Simon Hayward, London
KH: We had a nice time recording together. He's a lovely guy, a really talented and effervescent man. I love the way he works in the studio, it was a great experience. Things don't always have to come out for all parties to have gained. Those experiences, they find their ways through into other things. One track came out on the soundtrack of the HBO series The Jinx. There's lots of pieces that are unfinished, but at the moment all I'm interested in work-wise is what I'm doing with Rick.

Who is the greatest Doctor Who?
Sion Carlin, via Q Mail
RS: I haven't got a clue...
KH: William Hartnell was the Doctor when I was little. I think most people prefer the one who was on telly when they first got scared senseless and were forced to hide behind the sofa. You had to use your imagination a lot back in those days, which only made things scarier. Recently, I liked David Tennant. And I love the fact that so much of it nowadays is shot in Cardiff.

What's your personal motto?
Jamie O'Donnell, Bangor
KH: Oh, these questions are very good, aren't they?
RS: Half rice, half chips.
KH: Can I have curry sauce with that?

To take part in Cash For Questions, go to Qthemusic.com, follow @Qmagazine on Twitter or visit Facebook (facebook.com/qmagazine). £25 for each question printed! If yours is printed, email Qmail@Qthemusic.com to claim your money.



"We learnt a lot in the '80s that stood us in good stead. I'm not sure that we would have survived in the '90s if we'd not had those experiences." Karl Hyde

"Can we go now?": (left) Smith and Hyde get quizzical; (above) fish finger sandwiches – a Rick Smith speciality.

GETTY

The Orielles' Henry Carlyle Wade: "When I was 13, I sat down and learned loads of David Gilmour solos."

"Playing guitar should be something you do for fun... It should become part of your life."

Practice Makes Perfect

The Orielles' Henry Carlyle Wade gives his guide to playing guitar, and how Fender Play can help.

As the guitarist in indie-pop trio The Orielles, Henry Carlyle Wade uses all the tricks and techniques he's learned since he started playing the instrument aged six. Pink Floyd, Pavement and King Krule are just a few of the artists that have influenced his style and Carlyle Wade knows that there's always more room to practise and more to master, more to be inspired by. He gives us his guide to playing, whether you are picking up a guitar for the first time, or returning to it after letting it gather dust in the corner.

PREPARE TO LEARN

"The first time I got a guitar, I got in front of a mirror and tried to play it and realised I had no idea what I was doing, so my dad paid for some lessons. Retrospectively, that really taught me how to voice certain things, learning scales and the classical pieces you learn, a hundred different ways to play the same chord on the fretboard."

SOAK UP DIFFERENT STYLES

"I wanted to get better at playing lead guitar riffs, so I sat down and learned loads of David Gilmour solos when I was 13 years old. They took forever but I didn't really go out much when I was a kid so I just used to sit in my bedroom and play guitar for hours. After David Gilmour, I really got into Stephen Malkmus and Pavement, moving into discordant, janky riffs. Another person that really widened my guitar influences was King Krule, four or five years ago. Learning these jazz chords he was playing and then sitting down and learning his songs and the way he writes opened up a whole different genre of music I'd not listened to before."

PLAY IN THE DARK

"When I started to get into my teenage years, I used to play my guitar a lot in my bedroom with the lights off and feel the way around the guitar instead. From that, you're listening to what you're playing way more and cos you're feeling it with your hand, you kind of knock out that sense of sight and start to learn a different way of looking at the fretboard without seeing what you're playing. And it prepares you for playing a gig! It's kind of like climate rehearsal, it gets you used to the conditions you're gonna be playing in."

PRACTISE BY PLAYING A SONG YOU LOVE

"My girlfriend is quite new to playing guitar. She's only been playing for two years and I said to her the best thing she can do is think of a song you love the sound of the guitars on and sit down and learn it. You get inspiration from it and also instant gratification of knowing how to play something you love."

PRACTISE, PRACTISE, PRACTISE

"I went to Berlin recently and I came back after five days and it was like I'd not played guitar in years. It's becoming less of a rehearsal and more something you do for fun, like watching TV or playing a video game. It should become part of your life."

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“I’m on a

mission”

Now that Chris Martin has put nuisances like chart placings and tours behind him, he’s ready to focus on saving the world. Niall Doherty joins Coldplay in Jordan to hear how the singer found his calling.

Photography: Matt Miller

Rock the casbah! Coldplay (from left, Jonny Buckland, Chris Martin, Will Champion and Guy Berryman) perform at the Amman Citadel, Jordan, 23 November, 2019.

From November 2009 to June 2010,

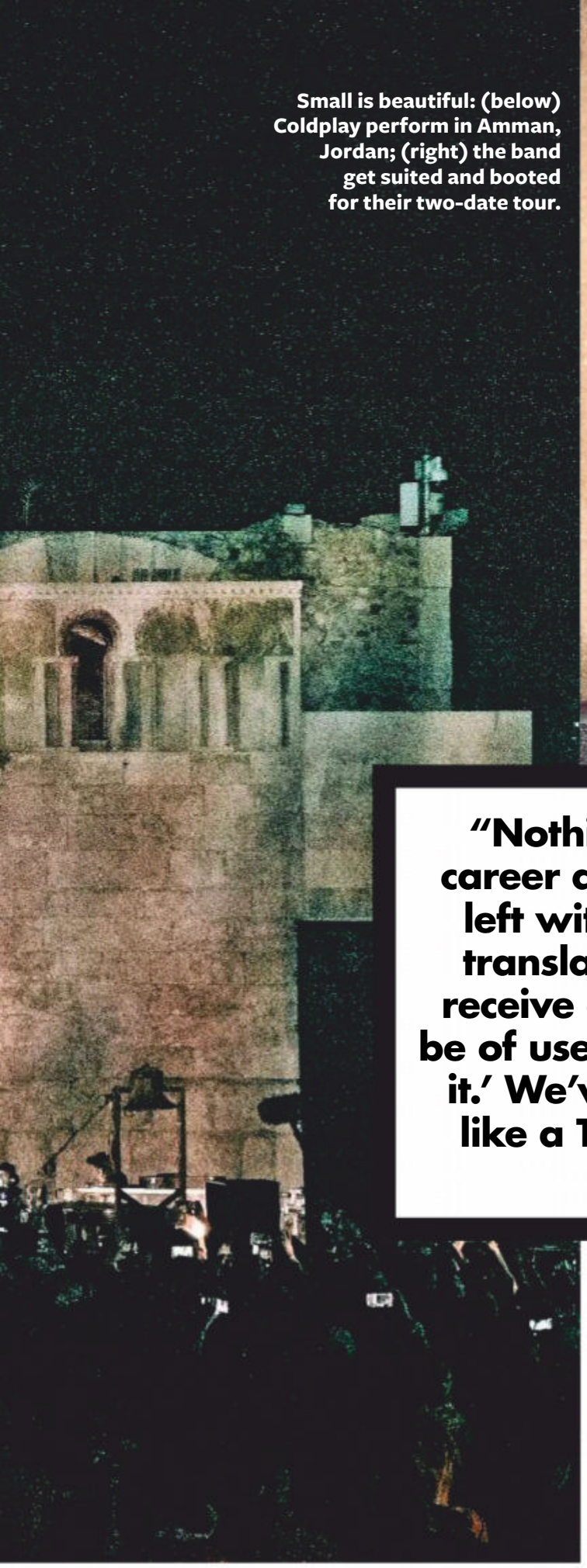
Coldplay spent eight months working on a record titled The Wedding Album. Emboldened by the huge success of 2008's Viva La Vida Or Death And All His Friends, they saw it as a diversion from their anthemic, stadium-rock sound. It would be totally acoustic, for a start, and they planned to debut it with a one-off show in a special location.

That was the plan. But one day Chris Martin walked in with a new song called Paradise, too epic and showy to be part of an acoustic album and too good to ignore, and The Wedding Album was canned. Instead, the band followed Paradise's lead and made a record of big singalongs. As their shows got bigger and more spectacular in the intervening years, Martin never forgot about The Wedding Album. The plan to launch a new release by playing it in a unique place stuck with him.

Amman, Jordan is not a regular stop on the schedules of big bands. But this is where Coldplay finally got round to the grand unveiling they'd been dreaming of. Yesterday, they celebrated the release of their eighth album, almost titled The Wedding Album but eventually renamed Everyday Life, with two live broadcasts from the Citadel, an ancient fortress here that dates back to the bronze age. They are back tonight to play a show to 600 people, tiny by Coldplay's standards.

Sitting atop Jabal Al-Qal'a, Amman's highest hill, the Citadel was not designed to host rock shows. There are wonderful, striking views of the bustling, sprawling city from up here, but nowhere that makes you think, "Mmm, that corner over there would be a great spot for a merch stand." Some poor roadie had to push Martin's grand piano up a really big hill to get it here.

It's a nippy Saturday evening. In a makeshift backstage area behind the Citadel ticket office, Chris Martin bounces into one of the Portakabins that's serving as a dressing room and takes a seat on the sofa. There's an intense, energetic presence to Martin, the sort that only really works in the



Small is beautiful: (below) Coldplay perform in Amman, Jordan; (right) the band get suited and booted for their two-date tour.

"Nothing is left in terms of career aspirations. You're just left with, 'Well our job is to translate the songs that we receive and get out there and be of use to people if they want it.' We've got to be a service, like a TV station. Or a tap."
Chris Martin

high-altitude setting of being a really famous singer in a really famous band. If this passionate, poised creature with a full-beam smile was an unknown and sat next to you on the bus, you would probably move seats.

It was important for Martin to come to Jordan, to what he calls "the middle of the Middle East."

"We dreamed about something like this for years and years. The news only ever really represents extremities of most societies," he says. "When you get on the ground anywhere, you tend to find most people just want to get on with their day and they're really nice."

Tonight is the first gig of the Everyday Life world tour. The last is in two days' time, at London's Natural History Museum. Coldplay knew from the outset of making this record that they would be doing things differently.

The Jordan trip ties into that, Martin explains, "because we're not touring and we're not really talking and not doing anything normal." As much as there's a side of him that wants to get out there and spread the good word, he is sticking to the plan. "This album feels like we have to just release it into the wild and let it fend for itself. Because a lot of these songs came from a place I don't really understand, and for other reasons too, it's just not tourable yet. We're trying to wait to tour until we can figure out the environmental side of things."

In a BBC interview a few days ago, the singer said that Coldplay were "taking time over the next year or two, to work out how our tour can not only be sustainable but also how can it be actively beneficial." As I'm about to mention that this story has become big news back home, Martin's eyes flash with a genuine panic, like when you're trying to avoid the football scores and think someone is about to tell you. "I haven't read anything at all," he interjects, "so you don't need to tell me anything about it."

He explains that he has insulated himself from all outside interference, dead set on maintaining militant tunnel-vision while he's out here doing his thing. It's a serious business. "I've stayed in a real cocoon cos I feel super-focused and super on a mission of some sort," he says.

Aren't you always on a mission of some sort?

"Yeah. But this time I'm not even aware of any reaction or any result... nothing, cos I feel a very strong calling to be doing a certain thing. It's always been there but maybe because the way the world is it's been bubbling extra-hard, extra-strong, like, 'OK, this is what we're supposed to be doing, let's head this way.'"

It must be a bit tiring, constantly trying to avoid all outside chatter, though?

"Yeah, but that's what I'm here for. That's what I'm on Earth for. I'm definitely not an underwear model. And it's unlikely that I'm going to have my own chain of cycling gyms. So I really would like to get good at this job."

Martin says his whole approach at the moment is informed by the fact that when their last tour was complete, there were no more professional ambitions for Coldplay to tick off. They had done it all, played the Superbowl half-time show, sold out every stadium on the planet. What was left?

"It was like, 'OK, we've got to that place, we've got to that job description, now what are we going to do with it?' And I hadn't felt that we'd got there until the end of that tour. Nothing is left in terms of career aspirations. You're just left with, 'Well, our job is to translate the songs that we receive and get out there and be of use to people if they want it.' We've got to be a service, like a TV station. Or a tap."

The state of the world has only hardened the frontman's belief that there is love and »

JAMES MARCUS HANEY

King of the hill: Chris Martin and band pull out all the stops for the Jordanian massive.

"No one has more right to be on Earth than me or you and no one's been put in charge. It's up to all of us." Chris Martin

joy out there. He's like a remix of The Incredible Hulk, where instead of getting angrier the more shit you throw at him, he gets more determined to share peace and love, man. "I think the way I hold on to such positivity is by being aware of the negativity," he declares. "I don't shut myself off from what is going on everywhere but there's only two real responses to the Brexits and the nationalistic movements and the climate crisis and the lithium mining and the pollution of rivers, either get super-aggressive and super-depressive, or say, 'OK, well what are we gonna do?' I don't wanna give up, I don't want to hide in a hole. It's a bit like at the beginning of Lord Of The Rings where The Shire is this lovely countryside-y place and whoever it is comes back, Gandalf or whoever, says, 'This trouble is coming here.' And some people are like, 'Ah, fuck it, well we'll just have a good time until it gets here,' and other people are like, 'Well, we better go and handle it.' And I'm very much in that group."

So you're Frodo?

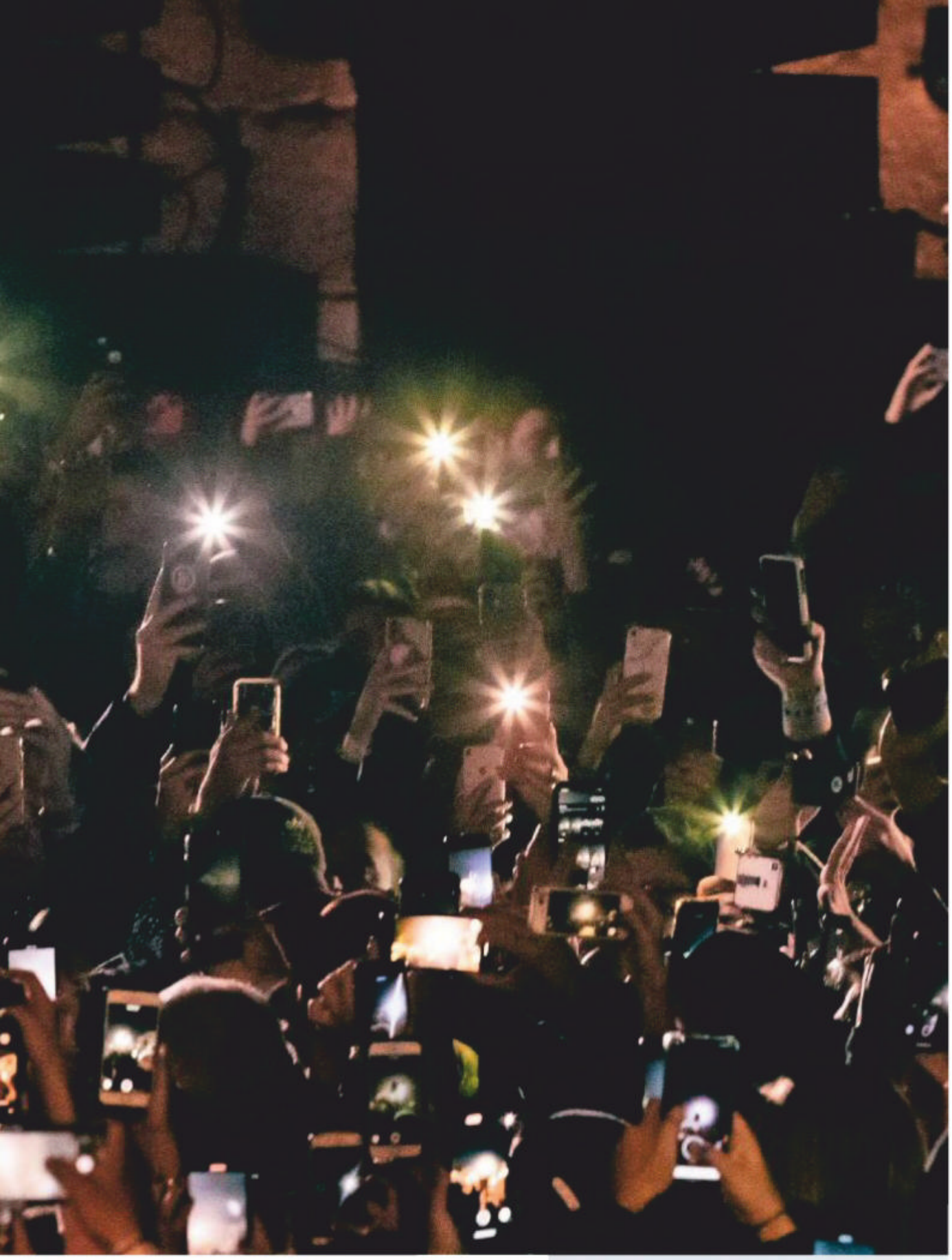
"I'm not Frodo, but I'm one of his mates. There's only two things, you can either hide in the countryside and say, 'Somebody else will deal with that', or realise that everybody is just the same level human as me, so why would I give up? No one has more right to be on Earth than me or you and no one's been put in charge. It's up to all of us."

As hard as it is to imagine, Martin does switch off sometimes. He even goes to sleep at night, aiming for a midnight bedtime but usually hitting the hay about two or three in the morning. He wakes at 6am. "I sleep in little chunks," he says, "like a Toblerone."

He checks his watch. It's 7.20pm. Stage time is 8.30pm and he needs an hour to prepare. With a hug and a handshake, Frodo's mate walks back across the backstage area and into the band's dressing room. Coming the other way, strumming an acoustic, is guitarist Jonny Buckland. There's a gentle, easy manner to Buckland, more of a stroller compared to the full-pelt frontman.

You wouldn't know it to look at him as he takes a seat in the Portakabin but Buckland is nervous about tonight's performance. "We knew we weren't going to tour this record from the start," he says, "and it informed the whole thing. You make different choices when you know you don't have to worry about playing it live. But, of course, then we did have to worry about playing it live." He looks at his guitar, placed next to him. "Hence me carrying a guitar about everywhere trying to work out how to play everything."

Drummer Will Champion arrives. He's polite and well-spoken, and feeling the chill.



Everyday life: the band gear up for their album-launching gig with a difference.

"Has this got a door?" he enquires, a scarf wrapped around his neck. He pulls the door shut. "Keep the cold out."

Did you realise Amman got cold at night when you decided to play here?

"No," says Buckland decisively. "I did not think it would be this cold."

The pair say the urge for a creative reset was something the whole band shared. "It was definitely a case of, 'We can't keep upping the ante,'" says Champion. "We felt it was time to broaden rather than keep getting bigger." The band took a year off in 2018, recharging their batteries after two years of touring. "The whole of that year was quiet," says Champion. "Although Chris was in the studio every day," adds Buckland. Champion says that Martin did a lot of travelling too, soaking up the music and influences that fed into the record.

They have spent the majority of their time in Amman up here at the Citadel, rehearsing and then filming the YouTube broadcast. "We'd love to come back and play some more shows at some point," says Champion. "And see more than just the Citadel," nods Buckland.

An hour later, they take to the stage that's been set up directly in front of the majestic Ummayad Palace. If there's any sense of apprehension about whether or not people in Jordan are fans of their music, it's wiped out immediately. There are huge cheers for the new songs and hysterical screams when they play Fix You and Viva La Vida. Deciding that the crowd deserve more big guns, halfway through they start tinkering with the setlist. After a quick discussion round the drumkit, they play Yellow and A Sky Full Of Stars. Apparently the Crown Prince is here, and he's witnessed a good one. It's a brilliant gig, a reminder that Coldplay don't need to rely on flashing wristbands or pyrotechnics to dazzle.

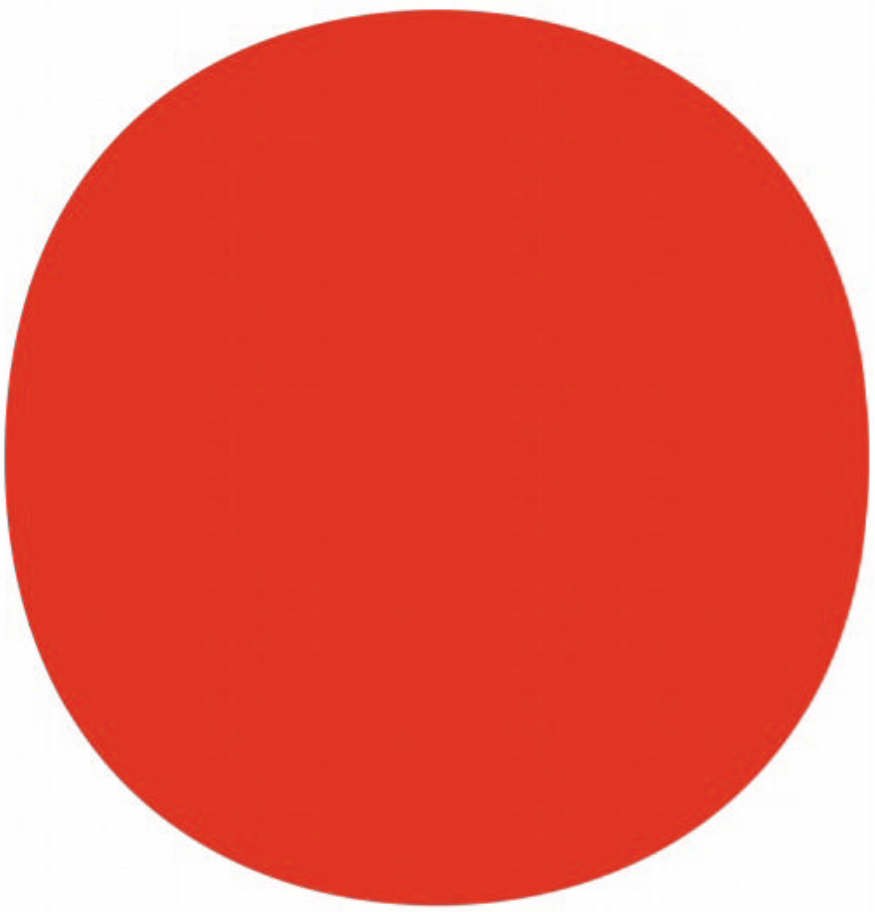
The show finishes at 11pm and the crowd flocks past the Roman ruins of the Temple Of Hercules, past the box office, and head down the hill towards Amman's downtown district. The tour to support Everyday Life is now 50 per cent complete. But what next? Earlier in the day, the band said they already had plans to fill the hole where a tour would be. "We're doing another record," said Jonny Buckland. "We knew this would probably be over by Christmas so we're keen to get on with the next thing," added Will Champion. "We've got songs ready to go and recording sessions earmarked. We're really excited to move on."

There was never any chance that Martin was going to sit still. "I've always got plans!" he says. "Life is short and precious and being in this band is such a treat. The more it goes on, the more you realise." He's determined to savour every second. No tour, no problem. Chris Martin and Coldplay have a lot to be getting on with.

The

Albums of The

All the best long-players of the last 12 months, plus the music that influenced them, with the stars' own personally chosen playlists.



Year 2019

Compiled by:

Rachel Aroesti, Eve Barlow, Laura Barton, Chris Catchpole, Leonie Cooper, Michael Cragg, Hannah J Davies, Niall Doherty, Tom Doyle, Dave Everley, Hannah Flint, Rupert Howe, Ted Kessler, Dorian Lynskey, Simon McEwen, Jazz Monroe, Victoria Segal, Laura Snapes.

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Self Esteem
Compliments Please

The Backstory: Formerly one half of indie duo Slow Club, Rebecca Lucy Taylor goes solo to reveal her true pop heart.
The Clincher: There's something genuinely unleashed about Taylor's solo debut: there in the mighty force of her voice, in her ear for body-shifting beats and unexpected rhythms, and, of course, in her lyrical acuity – taking down former lovers, music industry naysayers and anyone who might dare to make a woman feel small.
What They Say: "Naturally, I was always going to do this. I had to. I was going crazy, and now, it's really fun to be free. The knot in my stomach has gone."
Key Track: The Best. *LC*

Q&A: Self Esteem, aka Rebecca Taylor, on why she's Rotherham's answer to Kanye.

Compliments Please is one of Q's albums of the year – how do you feel?
"I'm very relieved! I was about to punch a wall."
You wanted it to sound like Kanye West's My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy...
"Kanye is my main inspiration. I try and rip him off as much as a white girl from Rotherham can."
It was recorded in Margate. Where's best there for fish and chips?
"Peter's Fish Factory – it's one of the only places I'll queue for. I order a large chips and gravy, I don't fuck with the fish any more. If you're being honest, you're just going for the carbs."
Did you know the album was a belter when you were making it?
"I still feel like it now. I'm so happy with it, but there was also loads of mad stress that I was ruining my career and everyone was going to hate it."
What was the most surreal moment of this year for you?
"Being creatively realised felt really weird. It's a brave new world out there when you're not being compromised. The shit I will think of and do now... My manager is worried."
So have you already got started with the next album?
"I've written most of it. I know what it's called. I know what the cover is. I've wanted to do this for so many years and now the gates are open, I'm not going to stop."
LEONIE COOPER

Self Esteem: unleashes her "lyrical acuity" on debut album Compliments Please.

49. The S.L.P.
The S.L.P.

The Backstory: With Kasabian taking a breather thoughout 2019, the band's musical mastermind Serge Pizzorno opted to spend his break making a record on his own. Almost.
The Clincher: Featuring a scene-stealing guest spot from Little Simz, The S.L.P. doesn't stray too far from the day job, but crucially pushes Pizzorno's wide-ranging tastes ('90s hip-hop, Afrobeat, Krautrock, Balearic house) further out there.
What They Say: "I just wanted to explore those different elements of my character and who I am creatively, dial them up and go deeper into them."
Key Track: Favourites (ft. Little Simz). *CC*

48. King Princess
Cheap Queen

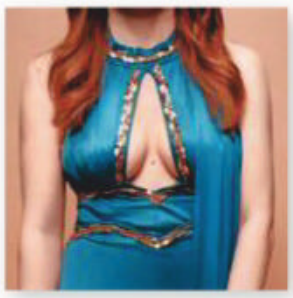
The Backstory: With a string of viral hits behind her, 20-year-old Brooklyn-born singer/songwriter/producer Mikaela Straus – already Mark Ronson and Harry Styles's favourite new artist – graduated from much-hyped newcomer to genuine breakthrough star.
The Clincher: Anthemic yet tender, Cheap Queen is a queer pop tour de force of slickly Auto-Tuned R&B and stripped-back balladry.
What They Say: "If you listen through, you're gonna get the story, and really enjoy it. I want a fucking saga, honey! I want a five-paragraph thesis, girl! I want content! Start to finish!"
Key Track: Hit The Back. *HJD*

47. Loyle Carner
Not Waving, But Drowning

The Backstory: Two years ago, the London rapper's debut bucked UK hip-hop's more lairy trends with sentimental rhymes and jazzy, old-school breaks.
The Clincher: The 25-year-old perfects the formula with a follow-up full of moving songs about family, love and the pressures of maturity.
What They Say: "[The title] meant a lot to me. This guy's way out in the ocean waving and his friends are on the beach saying, 'Look at him, thinking he's the dog's bollocks...' But really he's going, 'Yo, I'm the furthest out and I can't get back on my own.'"
Key Track: You Don't Know. *CC*

46. Ariana Grande
Thank U, Next

The Backstory: Just six months after Sweetener's healing, Pharrell-assisted R&B, the vocal powerhouse cemented her status as modern pop's newest icon.
The Clincher: Like its predecessor, Thank U, Next is tinged with tragedy, but here the emotional fall-out is bravely faced head on, flitting between the trap-flavoured Fake Smile's coping mechanisms, Ghostin's heart-bursting celestial flutter and the title track's playful self-care.
What They Say: "I made *[Thank U, Next]* with my best friends over the course of a really small period of time and it kind of saved my life."
Key Track: Imagine. *MC*



45. Jenny Lewis
On The Line

The Backstory: In the five years since her last solo album, the LA troubadour had lost her mother and a long-term relationship had hit the rocks. Thankfully, her humorous philosophy and way around a classic rock melody remained fully intact.
The Clincher: Her past work has shown Lewis to be one of the finest songwriters of her generation, but On The Line, made with a little help from her starry friends (Beck and Ringo Starr included), is her finest collection yet.
What They Say: "I feel in control of my craft right now in a way I hadn't fully felt before."
Key Track: Red Bull & Hennessy. *EB*

RACHAEL WRIGHT

Jenny Lewis: "one of the finest songwriters of her generation."

AUF WIEDER

“Anyone know where the pub is?” Elbow (from left, Craig Potter, Guy Garvey, Pete Turner, Mark Potter), Berlin, 14 November, 2019.

SEHEN, PET

The happiest tour on wheels rolls into Germany, powered by alcohol fumes. Niall Doherty hops aboard Elbow's tourbus for a hug and the largest beer in Europe.

Photography: Alex Lake

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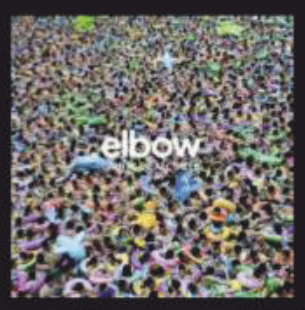


Elbow
Giants Of All Sizes

The Backstory: Taking in Brexit, Grenfell, the Manchester Arena bombing and the death of friends and family, Elbow's eighth album would see Guy Garvey railing against a brutal political climate as well as personal tragedy.

The Clincher: This was Elbow at their most vulnerable, raking through the fallen leaves of life but finding hope – as well as a fondness for experimentation – among the mess.

What They Say: "At times, it's a bleak record, but it has a huge, if bruised, heart." Guy Garvey

Key Track: Weightless. *LC*

ONE BY ONE,

the members of Elbow emerge in various states of disrepair. As they line up outside Huxleys Neue Welt, a venue in the Neukölln district of Berlin, they look like a case study in different shades of hangover. Keyboardist Craig Potter seems to be nursing a weighty one, perhaps an 8/10. He puts his sunglasses on to assess the situation. Any attempts to remove them are met with mock anguish by his bandmates, fearing the horrors that may lurk underneath. His brother, guitarist Mark, exhales slowly with a "how did that escalate so quickly?" look etched across his face. Bassist Pete Turner is in a smiley, huggy mood, chatting it out of his system, while frontman Guy Garvey surveys the scene calmly, a quiet sense of pride lurking.

This is what it's like being in Elbow. The 20th anniversary of their debut album Asleep In The Back is on the horizon but the quartet from Bury seem to have upheld the fantasy of what most people imagine it's like being in a band with your mates. They are deep into their 40s now, still making each other laugh, goading each other out of one hangover and into another. "We established when we were 17 that if it stops being fun, we'll stop doing it," says Garvey.

It's noon on a brisk mid-November day. Last night, Elbow had the best type of big night. The accidental big night. "We were just on the tourbus," says Garvey, a tone of surprise in his voice. "Sometimes the best nights are on the bus." They were playing a game where they had to guess the age of a celebrity and, for reasons no one can quite remember, had to touch the roof of the bus to deliver their answer.

There's never really one person who's more drunk than another on these occasions, they explain, although Turner often goes to bed and gets back up again just as everyone else is about to wrap it up. "Pete has three parties a night," says Mark. They're due to take to the stage in nine hours, plenty of time to shake this off. Perhaps a walk around the nearby Hasenheide park would help? "Ah, greenery!" exclaims Mark. "It's been all industrial estates and car parks on this tour."

This two-week trip, taking in dates across Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Denmark, follows the recent release of their excellent eighth album Giants Of All Sizes. A move away from the grandiose rock that made them a mainstream success, it's tightly-wound and scowling where usually their music is embracing, a record that peers into the abyss of modern life and decides that now is not the time for unifying singalongs. It became the band's third UK Number 1 in a row in October and the effect of that has been felt further afield, with offers coming in from Mexico and Australia for them to visit. "That's what happens when you get a Number 1, it still counts," says Garvey.

> "Name-drops keep falling on my head. It's a bad habit."
> *Guy Garvey*

We stroll into Hasenheide, stopping briefly to admire the statue of Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, who founded the German gymnastics movement in this very park. Garvey walks at the back of the group with a slow, confident stride, like he's his own security guard. Up ahead, as we reach a view across the city with Berlin's famous TV tower gloriously dominating the cityscape, Craig's face has turned to a picture of mild relief. His hangover is retreating. "Ah," he says, "that moment of feeling slightly better."

We wander back to the venue. In the band's dressing room, Turner heads straight for the well-stocked fridge and cracks open a beer.

"Go on, I'll have a sip," says Garvey, taking a bottle. Craig and Mark follow suit, getting comfy in their seats, power naps beckoning. Garvey, with the ghosts of hangovers past, present and future twinkling in his eye, turns to Q and says, "Shall we retreat to a nearby pub?"

"Now that's a beer!" marvels Garvey, staring down at the stein of lager the waiter has placed in front of him. The singer is in his element sharing confessional tales over a cosy table and a frothy pint. His conversation is much like his lyrics, a patchwork of profound contemplation and funny anecdotes, a deep thinker who doesn't take himself too seriously. Over the years, his words have touched on such personal experiences that Elbow's records sometimes feel like chapters from his memoir. "It's a weird thing to have songs associated with memories that are yours," he says. "Sometimes the strength of a lyric reminds me how potent the feeling was. It can keep bitterness fresh, perhaps years after it would've calmed down."

Writing Giants Of All Sizes required an emotional deep-dive from the singer. It's a record steeped in both personal and national tragedy, taking in the death of his father and two close friends, the Grenfell disaster, the Manchester bombing, drug addiction, neglect of the poor and more. "It's a barrel of laughs," he says, grimly.

Garvey's father Don, a former newspaper man and trade unionist who worked as a proof-reader for the Mirror Group, hangs over the whole album, his terminal illness and subsequent passing framing its beginning and end. The record's working title was Man In A Suitcase, one of Don's nicknames at work, "because he was the first name on the list for any trip away cos of his seven kids and little house." It was given to him by the same co-worker who anointed another of their colleagues "the seldom seen kid" on account of his regular absences on "union duty".

When Garvey thinks of his father now, the first thing that comes to mind are his hands. "They were fucking massive hands. We used to call him Hoth Wampa," he laughs, referring to the Luke Skywalker-stalking ice creature at the beginning of The Empire Strikes Back. "Despite his massive digits, he could get my glasses cleaner than »

One of the good Guys: Garvey, Berlin, November 2019.

"White Noise White Heat is about feelings of culpability, feelings of being part of the societal problem that led to homegrown terrorism and the erosion of safety procedures in favour of landlords getting a few more quid. If you're part of the society that lets that happen, then you feel culpable." *Guy Garvey*

anybody else ever. He could do such nimble things with his fucking massive digits. He could play the piano when the keys were smaller than his fingertips."

He says he could never pull the wool over his father's eyes: his dad could always see right through him and would laugh at what a terrible poker-face his son had. When he died, he gave each of his children a "ditty box", which referred to the container in which sailors would keep their personal items. In Guy's box, there was a photograph of his uncle Jack, a book of quotes by the Persian poet Omar Khayyam, school reports (the good ones) and a 2011 copy of Q with Garvey on the cover. "I didn't know he kept any of that stuff," he says. "I didn't know he was that proud." Also in the box was a brand new set of poker chips, an addition that confused the singer. "I asked my sister, 'Do you know anything about these?' and she went, 'Oh yeah, he said they're so you can work on your poker-face.'"

The passing of his father was a loving experience, he says, and there was no anguish. The uneasiness at the centre of Giants Of All Sizes comes from elsewhere. There was the death of his friends Scott

(Left) Going underground: Elbow take the U-Bahn; (above) "No, this way..." Garvey enjoys a pre-gig pint at Berlin's Huxleys Neue Welt.

Alexander and Jan Oldenburg, who were both influential figures on the Manchester music scene. "Jan was in his 70s and it was sad, but he had a heart attack and went. Scotty got cancer at 42, left two teenage kids, that was so unfair. That's where a lot of the anger comes from. It'll never be alright."

The record's best track, a glowering rock number titled White Noise White Heat, is a furious response to Grenfell and the Manchester bombing. "I wouldn't ever pretend to write a protest song on behalf of the survivors of either of those things," he explains. "White Noise White Heat is about feelings of culpability, feelings of being part of the societal problem that led to homegrown terrorism or the erosion of safety procedures in favour of landlords getting a few more quid. If you're part of the society that lets that happen, then you feel culpable, if you give a shit. But also feelings of uselessness because, as the song states, what good is a songwriter in the face of such things? It's pretty pointless."

Giants Of All Sizes was the hardest Elbow record for him to write and he required reassurance along the way from his wife, the actor Rachael Stirling. "You can love something for two years and then right at the last minute, you can start panicking," he says. "Rach was like, 'Have the courage of your convictions. You wrote it cos you felt it.'"

He's happiest at home with Stirling, sitting on the sofa watching the TV, or "dad and lad time" with his son Jack. "Rachael is super, uber-cool," he says, although he explains she can lose her composure when it comes to her husband's tendency to name-drop. "She hates it," he laughs. That Stirling's mother is acting royalty Diana Rigg, or the fact the two of them met at Benedict Cumberbatch's wedding, has probably not helped. "Klang klang klang!" he laughs. "Ridiculous." He says that Rigg has stories about every classic British actor you could name and he loves being able to re-distribute them. "I love hearing that shit, I love passing it on. Name-drops keep falling on my head. It's a bad habit."

There is something reassuring about being in the company of Garvey, a man with a warm, easy-going presence. He's long been a bit of an agony aunt to his friends. His mum says to him that when he was young, he was always on the phone to a girl he was secretly in love with, counselling them on someone they were in love with. His affable nature is at odds with a job he once had as head of security at Manchester venue The Roadhouse. "There was never a punch thrown on my watch, I could spot them coming," he proudly states. "One of the doormen used to call me Mystic Meg."

It's getting dark outside and almost time for Garvey to call his family back home for their daily catch-up. We finish our pints and walk back to the venue.

A few hours later, showtime is approaching and the members of Elbow are getting gig-ready in their dressing room. The band's long-serving tour assistant, Athena, checks in with Garvey to see what he'd like to drink onstage tonight. He pauses for a moment.

"Mmm, red wine and cola tonight, I think."

In the same glass?

"Yeah, it's disgusting, but it gives you all the things you need for a gig – a bit of alcohol from the red wine, a bit of energy from the cola," he explains decidedly, leaving us to silently go through all the other options that could provide a similar benefit without having to have red wine and coke in the same glass.

Soon after, Craig informs everyone that, because the stage is a little further away from the dressing room this evening, they should begin their vocal warm-ups slightly earlier. Then someone presses play and the new Elbow album comes on, and they all stand around the »

> “We tour in bursts so it’s not hard on the families back home. I know people in bands that deliberately tour for six months of the year. Like, ‘What are you avoiding?!’ Going on the road is the fun bit.” *Guy Garvey*

dressing room, drinking, singing along to their own record. As their pre-match rituals enter the final phase, Q gives them a moment and waits down the corridor, until the door pops back open and Garvey’s head comes out.

“I want this on the record!” he shouts.

OK, what is it?

“Pete just said one day he’d do a gig without having a drink!”

Garvey thinks that’s hilarious. Turner’s head emerges too. “What?”

It’s hard to imagine. There’s a two-pint giddiness to an Elbow live show, where everything’s alright, a safe space from the outside world, where everything’s a bit shit. The generational mix of the crowd inside Huxleys Neue Welt sums up the band’s appeal; old couples, young couples, mums and dads with *their* mums and dads. Euphoric singalongs are punctuated by speeches from Garvey about Brexit and Grenfell, the singer’s ability to switch from heavy topics to a manner befitting a chat over the garden fence with your neighbour at the centre of everything. At times, he’s just a really funny frontman. During the arms aloft outro to majestic closer One Day Like This, he repeatedly urges the crowd to “sing it out for Christmas! Come on, one more time for Christmas!” It’s the 14th of November.

Afterwards in a backstage green room, Garvey cracks open a can of Guinness and laughs to himself. “I just really like Christmas, I was feeling Christmassy!” he says. Garvey likes to make sure he can see the crowd at shows, regularly signalling to their lighting director to light up the audience. “I have to see everybody,” he avows. “It’s really important for the whole vibe.” Band members dot in and out of the room, chatting with old friends and introducing themselves to new ones. It’s a breezy, come-one-come-all vibe.

An hour or so later, everyone has moved to their hotel bar, a short walk from the stretch of Berlin Wall that has been reinvented as the East Side Gallery. Bar service will conclude at 2am, we’re told. Garvey takes a place by the entrance so he can drink and smoke. He thinks

“If it stops being fun, we’ll stop doing it...”: (left) Garvey, flanked by Mark Potter, conducts another mass singalong; (below) Elbow (with touring drummer Alex Reeves, left, and singers/strings Fiona Brice and Catriona Parker, right) bring some early festive cheer to the German capital.

that part of what makes touring fun for Elbow is that they don't do it so much they get sick of it. "We don't tour forever and ever," he says. "We tour in bursts so it's not hard on the families back home. I know people in bands that deliberately tour for six months of the year. Like, 'What are you avoiding?!' Going on the road is the fun bit." He says the departure of drummer Richard Jupp in 2016 helped to freshen up the dynamic between them, if only because it made the remaining quartet realise they would never not want to be in Elbow. "I couldn't believe he wanted to give it up," he reflects.

Back inside, the bar is now serving until 3am and Turner is hatching a plan to visit a karaoke place. He ventures there with Craig and some of the crew. Garvey gives everyone a hug and traipses off to bed, while Mark takes a stool at the bar and mulls over what to do on his day off in Berlin tomorrow. No doubt there will be a hangover to contend with, perhaps some light refreshments as a remedy. A few laughs, some hugs, old tales recounted anew, a dash of name-dropping here and there. It's what makes Elbow's world go round. They could never give this up. As long as it's still a laugh, they'll keep on going.

43

James Blake
Assume Form

The Backstory: Leaving "blubstep" squarely behind him, Blake's move to California saw him discover a radiant new outlook on life and love.

The Clincher: Conjuring a richly orchestral electronica fluid enough to include cameos from Travis Scott, Andre 3000 and flamenco star Rosalía, Blake steps away from glitchy, post-dubstep angst to deliver his most candid, and compelling, statement to date.

What They Say: "I'm just a piece of this record and without *[my collaborators]* this record wouldn't have been what it was."

Key Track: Barefoot In The Park. *RH*

James Blake: taking a plunge into "richly orchestral electronica" territory.

Q&A: James Blake on his move to LA and creative rebirth.

You tried something new with Assume Form. Was the reception what you expected?
"You never know what to expect, do you? It's more like, 'Fingers crossed and hope for the best!' It's very rare I take a big leap with my sound. Usually it's incremental changes and progression over a period of time. It seems like a big step, but actually it's been the product of lots of little fun experiments."

Living in LA, some Californian warmth found its way in. Was part of that working at Rick Rubin's Shangri La studio?
"Definitely, yeah. Maybe an equivalent to the Laurel Canyon thing in the '70s when there was a hotbed of collaboration going on there. A similar thing happened on Assume Form, except the drugs have changed and we're all addicted to our laptops!"

You later spoke up on Twitter about the role of your partner, actress Jameela Jamil, who gets a production credit...
"There's rightly the assumption she inspired a lot of the record, but she wasn't just a 'muse'. If someone says, 'Hey, I don't like that part' in a song and you change it, what's the difference between a producer saying it and your partner? Usually the partner won't be credited, whereas if a producer says it, then they would."

There's an essay by you in a new book on mental health. How should we view that alongside the album?
"For her book It's Not OK To Feel Blue (And Other Lies), Scarlett Curtis gave me an opportunity to speak on toxic masculinity and mental health in men. Specifically privileged white men, which is the only group I can write about from experience. It was incredibly scary writing it. I had to go into some really personal shit. It's not directly connected to the record, though I talk about my mental health struggle there, too."

Assume Form had a very lush, expansive sound. Musically, where are you at now?
"I'll tell you when the music's finished, I guess. At the moment I'm experimenting, but there's a lot more in the locker. I want to DJ more, do my solo piano shows. Plus I didn't really release much after the album, so next year I'm going to correct that!"
RUPERT HOWE

42. FKA twigs Magdalene

The Backstory: Now a beleaguered tabloid fixture, the pop visionary underwent major surgery for fibroid tumours in 2017, opening a five-year gap between her buzzy debut and this high-stakes follow-up.
The Clincher: Daring, difficult and unafraid of pretension, this operatic record draws on classicism and club futurism alike, channelling physical and emotional tumult into an art-pop benchmark.
What They Say: "I made it at a time when I was in recovery – physically and emotionally... but just when you think it's about to fall apart, there's an absolute defiance and strength."
Key Track: Cellophane. *JM*

FKA twigs: Magdalene is "difficult, daring and unafraid of pretension."

41. Liam Gallagher Why Me? Why Not.

The Backstory: The second solo album from the former Oasis frontman and King Parka Monkey himself – but would it have as much clout as the all-conquering As You Were?
The Clincher: An excess of confidence, a clutch of class-A songwriters and collaborators (including Cherry Ghost and Andrew Wyatt) and an absolute belter of a John Lennon-worthy ballad in Once made Liam 2:0 a total triumph.
What They Say: "I see my music as like a Sunday roast. As an idea, it's been mastered. But I want to make the very best version of it that you can have."
Key Track: Now That I've Found You. *LC*

40. Underworld Drift Series 1

The Backstory: Not a band to shirk a challenge, the electronica duo released a new piece of music or film, created in a variety of locations, every week for a year as part of their Drift project. This seven-disc set, also released as a single-disc sampler, collated the opus.
The Clincher: A creative tour-de-force from the dance music pioneers, still finding new ways to do things four decades into their career and, by the sounds of highlight STAR, having a ball doing so.
What They Say: "It's made us talk, it's made us work, it's made us experiment more." Rick Smith
Key Track: STAR. *ND*

39. Purple Mountains Purple Mountains

The Backstory: Ten years after he took Silver Jews out of circulation, this new start for David Berman tragically became one last brilliant broadcast on the human condition.
The Clincher: After Berman's suicide in August, it was impossible not to feel a new chill running through tracks such as All My Happiness Is Gone. As testament to its writer's dazzling lyrical gifts, though, Purple Mountains is a joy and a sorrow.
What They Say: "The world is and will always be a David Berman lyric." Bill Callahan
Key Track: Nights That Won't Happen. *VS*

38. Sleaford Mods Eton Alive

The Backstory: Chief SM ranter Jason Williamson unconvincingly talked up the duo's fifth studio album as their "poppiest" yet.
The Clincher: Despite its title and time of release, Eton Alive wasn't the scabrous, state-of-Brexit-Britain address one might expect. In fact it *was* Sleaford Mods' most accessible and personal offering to date, a record which sought to reach out and connect in an angry, cold-blooded world.
What They Say: "I was listening to a lot of '80s soul, and hip-hop and trap that uses a lot of soul. I wanted to communicate that way." Jason Williamson
Key Track: Kebab Spider. *SM*

MATTHEW STONE

“I like having a fucking job that I like doing.” Rock visionary John Dwyer, Stepney, London, September 2019.

Photography:
Oliver Halfin

JOHN DWYER

37

Oh Sees Face Stabber

The Backstory: Oh Sees linchpin and Hardest Working Person In Showbiz John Dwyer slackened the pace by only releasing the one album this year. Though to be fair, it was this dizzying double.

The Clincher: Pinballing between sinister psych funk and 21-minute wig-outs, it cements Dwyer's status as one of modern music's great mavericks.

What They Say: "It's not hard to do this shit. Go in there, play some music, make it good, then put it out. If people like it they'll listen to it, If they don't, fuck 'em." John Dwyer

Key Track: Snickersnee. *DE*

John Dwyer has appeared on nearly 40 albums. Twenty-two of those have been with his main band, called, alternatively, Oh Sees, The Oh Sees, Thee Oh Sees, OCS and assorted other interchangeable permutations. Dave Everley meets a one-man music industry and the master of a psychedelic-punk universe of his own creation.

John Dwyer will never forget the first time he played in London. He arrived with two legs and nearly went home with one.

It was 2003, and the man best known today as the driving force behind underground rock free radicals Oh Sees was in the capital with one of the many bands he was involved in at the time, faux-homoerotic industrial synth-pop provocateurs Zeigenbock Kopf.

Back then he used to perform on the floor in the middle of the crowd. This was partly about dismantling the barrier between band and audience, and partly about good old-fashioned spectacle. It's also the reason that Dwyer has ended up with a mouthful of broken teeth from having the mic kicked in his face, but that's another story.

This particular night, he came close to losing more than just his gnashers. He managed to get a piece of dirty glass in his leg, which quickly became infected and spread through his bloodstream.

His leg swelled up and he was taken to St Thomas' Hospital, where he drifted in and out of consciousness. He woke up long enough to get into a delirious argument with his doctor, which escalated into a screaming match that almost ended up with the police »

being called. He remembers looking at his engorged limb, thinking, "Are they going to cut it off?"

The answer was "very possibly", but thankfully the NHS and modern medicine prevailed, and John Dwyer's leg was saved. A few days later, the swelling had gone down enough for him to fly back home to San Francisco. A few days after that he was up and playing guitar, letting free whatever demented sounds were rattling around his head.

It takes a lot more than the threat of losing a leg to stop John Dwyer from doing what he does. As of 2019 he has appeared on close to 40 albums. Twenty-two of those have been with his main band, called, alternatively, Oh Sees, The Oh Sees, Thee Oh Sees, OCS and assorted other interchangeable permutations. He's a one-man music industry, the master of a universe of his own creation, one of American rock's last great untameables.

Recently, a French filmmaker approached him about a potential documentary. Dwyer was sceptical. "I was, like, 'You want to follow me back to the hotel an hour after we play so I can sit on my ass and read?'" he says today.

This is either hugely disingenuous or the least self-aware thing anyone has ever said. John Dwyer is many things, but boring is not one of them.

His brush with amputation didn't put Dwyer off London. It's mid-autumn, and he's back in the city with Oh Sees to play renovated 1930s art deco cinema Troxy in support of this year's dazzling and disorientating Face Stabber album.

He doesn't play in the middle of the floor any more. These days Dwyer prefers a more traditional onstage arrangement, though even this involves two separate drummers playing in unison front and centre. It's only to be expected. John Dwyer struggles with "traditional".

He cuts a striking figure up there: bug-eyed, jaw clenched, clad in a tight striped vest and cut-off shorts, guitar held way up near his neck. Offstage, sitting in a quiet backstage room, he looks less eccentric, a lean, well-preserved 45-year-old in dark double denim. Only the mix'n'match tattoos that adorn his arms and neckline, some looking decidedly home-made, hint at transgression.

Dwyer loves to talk. Not in the windy, thine-ears-are-mine fashion of a pub bore, but with the million-miles-an-hour, caution-to-the-wind energy of the permanently wired. He's a pumping knee in human form, though in his case that energy is purely natural.

That wasn't always the case. Dwyer spent several years in the noughties strung out on various chemicals, chiefly crystal meth. It was a delirious, dark time, though not without its upsides. "I remember doing speed with Mark E Smith," he says. "That was one of the greatest days of my life. He was very nice to me, partly because I brought him meth, which was virtually impossible to find back in Europe. That guy was a good guy."

He gave up the drug after finding himself scoring in a supermarket bathroom stall at 6am once too often. That was over a decade ago. "Marijuana and alcohol, they're the crux of my addiction now," he says. "Keeping it simple."

That's not strictly true. An addiction John Dwyer has never been able to shake is making music, though he'd never describe it like that. Instead, he views his work rate in more prosaic terms. "We record, technically, one album a year," he says of the Oh Sees. "Which has us labelled 'prolific', which almost seems derogatory. We're just fucking efficient."

(Left) Dwyer gets high, Troxy, London, 6 September, 2019; (right) "What's this pedal do?!"

> "I remember doing speed with Mark E Smith. That was one of the greatest days of my life. He was very nice to me, partly because I brought him meth. That guy was a good guy."

Still, if productivity is any measure, Dwyer's job satisfaction rating must be through the roof. He estimates that he has written around 400 songs, though that output is easier to quantify than it is qualify. His early albums, released under the name OCS, were largely centred around dislocated freak-folk heavily inspired by his chemical intake. "Half those songs are about smoking speed," he says of the music from that period.

Since then, he has dipped in and out of garage rock, Krautrock, lo-fi synth-pop, psychedelia and all manner of other outlying genres, tweaking the name of the band whenever the music called for it and/or the mood took him. Then there are the numerous other projects he's led down the years: Damaged Bug (wild-eyed electronic madness), Sword And Sandals (deranged free jazz), Dig That Body Up, It's Alive (unironic death metal)... it goes on.

Dwyer doesn't see this as anything out of the ordinary. But then his version of normal is out of sync with everyone else's. For instance, he teaches himself to play a new musical instrument every year: the flute or cello or, his current jam, the EWI, a kind of electronic kazoo-trumpet popular in the '80s.

"I do it just enough so that I could fake a song," he says. "After faking something for long enough, you accidentally fall ass-backwards into learning what you're doing."

Falling ass-backwards into doing something was how John Dwyer started out more than 20 years ago. And he's not stopped to right himself ever since.

Dwyer grew up an '80s metal kid in Providence, Rhode Island. Ozzy Osbourne and Iron Maiden were his guys, and he still talks fondly of both. He read pulp sci-fi novels and played Dungeons & Dragons while fried out of his mind on acid. "Me and my friend Mikey would be sitting at this table with a big group of nerds, sweating, rolling the dice and struggling to add it up."

He hasn't played D&D for decades, though the fantasy influences remain. Several Oh Sees albums have featured an array of smoke-snorting demons and green-skinned goblin-type creatures. He even titled their 2017 album Orc.

"I think it's trying to Rosebud a little bit," he says, referring to the sledge-come-childhood talisman in Orson Welles's Citizen Kane. "Going back to the things you enjoyed before you got a bunch of shit on your plate. I really miss it."

It's a rare adult that admits to an urge to playing old-school paper-and-dice role-playing games. He shrugs. "I'm 45, what the fuck do I care what people think? If somebody doesn't like it, they can go fuck themselves."

That don't-give-a-fuck attitude was cemented by punk rock. Skateboarding led him there as a teenager, saving him from a life of full-time acid-fried nerdery in the process. Providence had a roaring underground scene, and Dwyer immersed himself in it. "I was this young kid getting knocked out cold by skinheads at shows," he says. "Loved it."

If Providence was his cradle, then San Francisco was his playground. Dwyer moved there in his early 20s, drawn by the city's artistic gravitational pull and the fact that he could live on a couple of hundred dollars a month while burning through shitty jobs (house painter, bike messenger, marijuana plant leaf trimmer). He says he was the laziest worker he knew, which is pretty ironic all things considered.

"Yep, did as little as possible. Hated working for other people. It's different working for myself. If it's something I like I'll work on it all day and all night."

The band that would eventually become Oh Sees didn't exactly form so much as come into focus. Dwyer began releasing songs as Orinoka Crash Suite on late-'90s noise rock compilations as a sideline to his regular gig as one half of noise merchants Pink And Brown. Even by the time he had abbreviated the name to OCS for their self-titled debut album in 2003, he still had multiple other bands on the go, primarily garage-punk provocateurs Coachwhips.

There were plenty of places for someone like Dwyer to play in pre-gentrification San Francisco. Home from home was the Eagle Tavern, a leather daddy bar with a décor that was heavy on cocks and motorbikes. The clientele embraced Dwyer and his »

righteous noise the very first time he played there with Coachwhips.

"We didn't want to play on the stage, so we went out in the backyard next to the fire pit. While we were playing I jumped on the fire and my shoes got all burned up. And the promoter was, like, 'You are welcome back any time you want.'"

When Coachwhips dissolved in 2005, he shifted his focus to OCS, taking on some of his old band's noisier attributes. In 2007, he co-founded a label, Castle Face, to release his own music. By the end of the decade, he had become the unlikely godfather of a thriving garage rock scene – a ringleader of the demented. The most famous graduate of the unofficial John Dwyer Youth Academy is Ty Segall, who the older man encouraged when he moved to the Bay Area.

Dwyer loathes the term "garage rock" these days, though he'll take the "godfather" compliment. "If it inspired someone to make music, period, I'm happy," he says. "I did it, and a lot of people do it, because it's simple. Anybody can fucking do it."

Dwyer was finally priced out of San Francisco by the digital tech gold rush a few years ago. He lives in LA now. His girlfriend likes to tell him that if he hadn't taken that first hit of LSD way back when, he would have ended up in a very different place, doing very different things.

"I'd be an asshole who runs a bank and be in trouble for different reasons," he says. "Or maybe a right-wing nut job. But I'd probably have plenty more money than I do now."

He might not be troubling the compilers of the Forbes 400 rich list, but the stream of records by his and other people's bands released on Castle Face suggest he's keeping his head above water, the centre of a parallel-universe musical empire.

Dwyer is an outlier in accepted industry terms, and he's happy there. He calls today's popular music "algorithmic garbage... it's like that fucking Fabreze smell you get in an Uber. It gives me a fucking headache."

It's hard to tell whether he's playing at being a cranky underground dude or whether he genuinely believes it.

"It's both, for sure," he concedes. Then he decides to double down. "But I have no respect for the people or the players or the industry or the systems behind it." He has friends who write songs for other people. "I have to listen to this shit that they churn out, hoping that some asshole will buy it and turn it into a hit so they can buy a fucking house."

He laughs, self-aware. "I'm an old white man, so who really gives a fuck what I think."

In fairness to the modern pop industry, the disdain is mutual. Dwyer only started putting out his own records in the first place because no other label would. "It wasn't like I decided to take the high road. The reality is that no one gave a fucking shit."

Today, Dwyer owns all the music he's ever

"I hate policing people, but I'm good at it." Dwyer (second left) with the Oh Sees, backstage at the Troxy; (right, from top) Thee Oh Sees' Castlemania (2011) and Floating Coffin (2013) LPs, Oh Sees' Smote Reverser (2018).

> "We record, technically, one album a year. Which has us labelled 'prolific', which almost seems derogatory. We're just fucking efficient."

The Best Of JOHN DWYER

From distorted garage rock to freak folk to freewheeling psych-outs and beyond, the pick of JD's vast output.

1 Frozen Secret
Final Foods (2001)
Clamorous noise from Dwyer's early duo Pink And Brown. Borderline migraine-inducing, but lays out the non-conformist agenda that he's followed since.

2 You Gonna Get It
Bangers Vs Fuckers (2004)
Garage rock in excelsis from Dwyer's then-main band, Coachwhips. Distorted and exhilarating, like an unhinged White Stripes.

3 Devil's Last Breath
OCS 4: Get Stoved (2005)
Amid the fragmentary freak folk of Dwyer's early OCS work, this short burst of minor-key melancholia shines through.

4 Untitled (Track 1)
Good & Plenty (2010)
A drum-playing Dwyer in free jazz mode under the handle Sword & Sandals. This first track from their sole album is fuelled by edge-of-collapse improvisation.

made, "apart from maybe one EP that came out on Sub Pop, and I'm pretty sure they'd give it to me if I asked." This is less a display of avarice than autonomy. Ironically, it puts him in the company of people he otherwise shares no common ground with.

"What's her name?" he says. "Not Katy Perry, the other white pop singer girl. *[Thinking hard]* Taylor Swift. She owns her own music. I'm like, 'Fucking kudos to you.'"

There's no doubting who's in charge of Oh Sees. "I hate policing people, but I'm good it," says Dwyer. But there's a near-communist wage structure in place, with everyone earning the same money irrespective of their role. It was a lesson he learned putting in the hard yards back in Providence, watching better-off bandmates hover well above the breadline while he struggled to buy a slice of cheap pizza to feed himself.

"I thought, 'Pay everyone equally, no one has any reason to complain,'" he reasons. "I tell them at the start: 'If anybody says anything weird about money, fuck off, you're out of the band.'"

For all his pragmatism, Dwyer does have his peccadilloes. He's into "crystals and shit", stopping off at New Age shops whenever he gets the chance – a spiritual hangover, he says, from his long-abandoned Catholic upbringing.

He used to burn bunches of sage before he went onstage, "to negate the negative energy." He stopped a few years ago, after being pulled up on it by a Native American fan. She told him he was doing it wrong, that he wasn't "opening the door to let in wellness." On her advice, he now burns sage and sweetgrass before shows. "Sometimes if we forget to do it and play a bad show, it's like, 'Oh, it's the fucking sage.'"

The fucking sage is working its magic tonight. The Eagle Tavern, with its cocks and firepits, is long behind him, but the freak flag Dwyer unfurled back then still flies proudly during Oh Sees' manic set at the Troxy. If it doesn't quite display the full bandwidth of his artistic output, it still pinballs between the mutant rock'n'roll of Tidal Wave, Jettisoned's psychedelic motorik and a jazzy, fleshed-out jam on Thee Oh Sees' Encrypted Bounce that evokes late-'70s Frank Zappa, someone with whom Dwyer shares both an autocratic leadership style and a resolute disdain for doing things any way but his own.

What Dwyer calls "touring season" is coming to a close, though the wheels of industry never slow down. A few days after we speak, he'll be back in LA with his girlfriend, smoking dope and screen-printing posters in his backyard for the next tour. "It's the life of fucking Riley," he says. "It's not like I'm out there breaking rocks or moving furniture for other people."

He's also working on an exhibition of paintings he's done, inspired by the covers of the sci-fi novels he devoured as a kid. "Chrome vegetation in a decimated world, that kind of thing. I'm planning on going deaf and falling back on painting."

There are a lot of input streams, but what does he ultimately want out of all of this?

"I like that I have a fucking job I like doing," he says. "Life is short. If you can do something you're happy doing, why not do it? It doesn't have to be world-changing. Just fucking enjoy yourself."

The last time I speak to him, John Dwyer really is enjoying himself. He's side stage at the Troxy, watching support act Träd, Gräs Och Stenar, a group of grey-haired Swedes playing political psych-prog. Dwyer invited them to play tonight, and he's lost in the music. He phases back into reality momentarily, says something unintelligible above the noise and puts his thumbs up. Then he turns back to the stage, back in his own universe once more.

5 Stinking Cloud
Castlemania (2011)
In others' hands, this more-or-less solo outing would sound like rickety psychedelia. Dwyer's strangulated gargle and slashes of trumpet turn it into something creepier.

6 Toe Cutter/ Thumb Buster
Floating Coffin (2013)
Mid-period Thee Oh Sees encapsulated in three minutes and 32 seconds: disconnected vocals, growling groove and twirling tendrils of guitar.

7 Gloves For Garbage
Hubba Bubba (2014)
Damaged Bug is the sound of Dwyer running amok in a vintage electronic laboratory, though a sly pop sensibility runs beneath the surface.

8 Poor Queen
Mutilator Defeated At Last (2015)
Thee Oh Sees' beefy 16th album pursued a relatively straightahead sound – "straightahead" being just another phase Dwyer was going through.

9 Memory Of A Cut Off Head
Memory Of A Cut Off Head (2017)
Dwyer resurrects the OCS name, though the chemical fug of old has dissipated on this gentle, psych-tinged country-folk gem.

10 Snickersnee
Face Stabber (2019)
Rubbery psych-funk located amid the sprawl of Oh Sees' most recent (double) album, with Dwyer keening like an alternative universe Ozzy Osbourne.

36. Brittany Howard Jaime

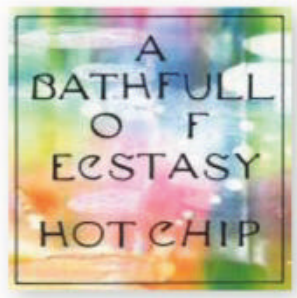
The Backstory: The first solo album from the Alabama Shakes singer, named after the teenage sister she lost to cancer.
The Clincher: Freed from the constraints of a band, Brittany Howard soars creatively on Jaime. The spectre of Prince hovers over the inventive funk/soul, as Howard addresses her relationship with God (who is non-judgemental of her drinking and weed-puffing in He Loves Me) and a remote figure of her lust (Georgia). Deeply personal, brave and brilliant.
What They Say: "I created this, I produced this. I arranged this, I composed this. This is mine and no one edited me."
Key Track: Stay High. *TD*

35. Taylor Swift Lover

The Backstory: After her annus horribilis, Swift vanished and sought comfort in the safety of her first lasting romance. This restored her strongest skill: writing love songs. Sometimes tender, sometimes cheeky, always ironclad.
The Clincher: Plenty of critics couldn't look past the first two singles. More fool them: Lover is as much of an intimate, inviting world as Lorde's Melodrama, and boasts a hard-won and convincing perspective on the truly important things in life.
What They Say: "I know the difference between making art and living your life like a reality star."
Key Track: Cruel Summer. *LS*

34. The Specials Encore

The Backstory: Could the first proper Specials studio album (and first genuinely collaborative effort) in nearly 40 years actually deliver?
The Clincher: Yes, and in spades. Encore was both a political and personal triumph, serving up a broad musical palette which took in Blockheads funk, skanking reggae and Brechtian oompah. It also gave last men standing, singer Terry Hall, guitarist/vocalist Lynval Golding and bassist Horace Panter, another first: a Number 1 album in the UK charts.
What They Say: "I think we've discovered real happiness in the last 10 years." Terry Hall
Key Track: Vote For Me. *SM*



33. Hot Chip A Bath Full Of Ecstasy

The Backstory: Seven albums in, dance-pop's national treasures brought in Rodaidh McDonald and the late Philippe Zdar to help make their deepest, warmest, fullest album yet.
The Clincher: The title didn't lie. The psychedically-inspired soundscaping was faultless – just check out the euphoric, Zdar-enhanced breakdown on Spell – but the album's heart and soul lay in Alexis Taylor's tender empathy and Joe Goddard's cosmic ruminations.
What They Say: "We wanted to say something positive in a difficult time." Alexis Taylor
Key Track: Spell. *DL*

JEREMY YOUNG

32

These New Puritans
Inside The Rose

The Backstory: Known for quixotic, critically beloved epics, the brothers Barnett added a final ingredient – concision – to their sprawling avant-pop.

The Clincher: Hurtling through melodic mazes, uncanny valleys and grandiose peaks, Inside The Rose streamlines the Essex duo's agitation and opulence into a synth-pop tour-de-force.

What They Say: "We're in a risk-averse culture which is afraid of anything inexplicable. Is that the best we can do? Is that the most dangerous way we can live?" Jack Barnett

Key Track: A-R-P. *JM*

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These New Puritans: the Barnett brothers scaled new heights in 2019.

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The Murder Capital
When I Have Fears

The Backstory: Hot on the heels of fellow Dublin-based outfit Fontaines D.C., The Murder Capital presented a visceral, impassioned take on rowdy post-punk.

The Clincher: Born from tragedy, When I Have Fears packed an emotional punch equal to the brutalist thud of its music thanks largely to frontman James McGovern's painfully honest lyrics. Moving in every sense.

What They Say: "If you try to understand the entire spectrum of existence then you leave yourself completely open the whole time, you're taking in everything." James McGovern

Key Track: For Everything. *CC*

Emotional Rescue

Naming their band The Murder Capital gave five friends from Dublin focus and succour in the midst of grief and turmoil. Now, the art-punkers are spreading that medicine out, one pulverised concert hall at a time. Chris Catchpole reports from the frontline.

Photography: Oliver Halfin

Subway sect: The Murder Capital (from left, Cathal Roper, Gabriel Blake, James McGovern, Diarmuid Brennan, Damien Tuit) prepare to check out Germany's "most sinful mile", Hamburg, 12 November, 2019.

Running in parallel to Hamburg's docks, the Reeperbahn has been a destination for those seeking illicit entertainment since as far back as the 17th century. Today, while gangs of marauding sailors have largely been replaced by tourists and surprisingly well-behaved German stag parties, the country's "most sinful mile" isn't backward in coming forward. Neon signs and peeling posters adorn places with names like Pink Palace, Eros Centre and Titty Twisters.

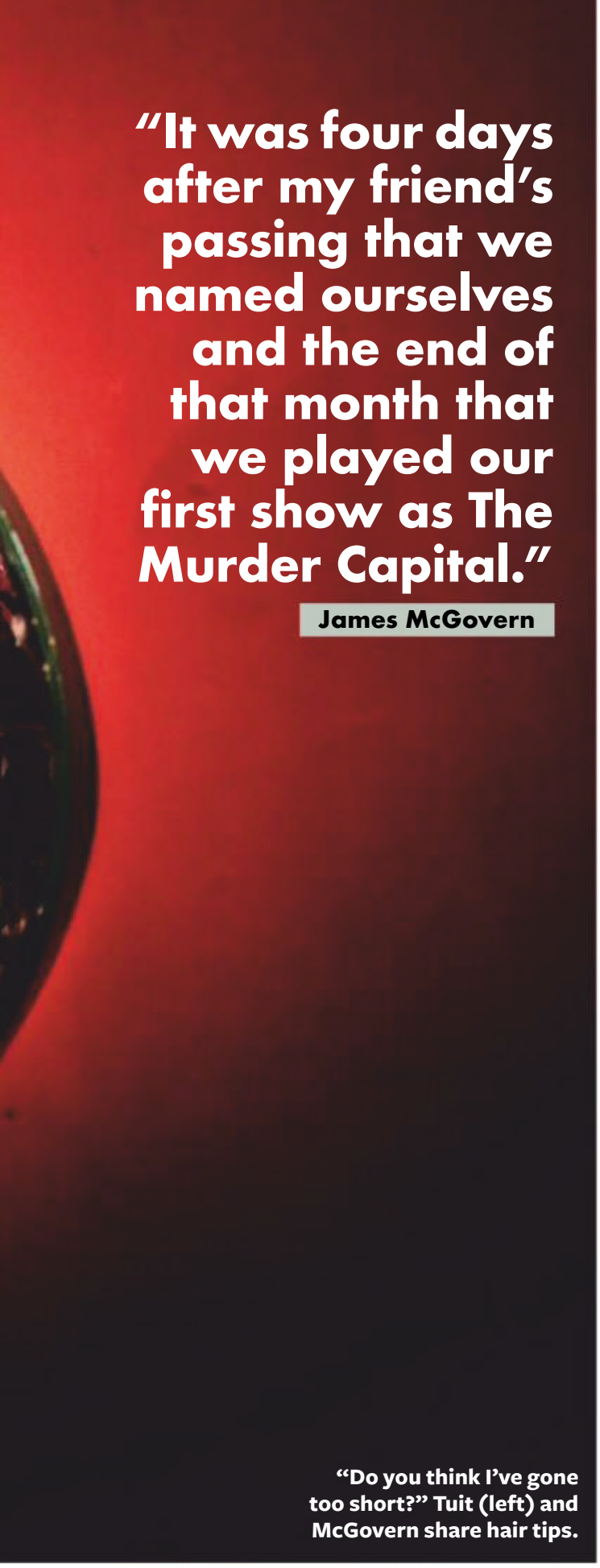
Past a metal statue commemorating The Beatles' time here and opposite the local branch of Hooters sits the Molotov Music Club, its broken windows and battered frontage making the place look like a few of its titular cocktails have been hurled into it over the years. It might not seem the obvious setting for a public display of male sensitivity, but onstage The Murder Capital's frontman James McGovern is making an emotional tribute to his bandmates.

It's the Dublin-based quintet's first ever gig in Germany and he wants the crowd to know how important it is for him to be standing up there with his best friends, adding that he knows they won't be with him for ever. He's visibly upset, but the politely head-nodding crowd appear unmoved. "Are you alive!?" McGovern bellows at them before flinging himself into the front row. If you want a moshpit done properly, start it yourself: the place dutifully erupts.

The Murder Capital are a group who exist on the precipice of snarling ferocity and wounded vulnerability. This year's debut album, When I Have Fears, howls and moans like IDLES roughhousing Joy Division; its brutalist sonic architecture stained with grief, anguish and the scars of a tragedy that lies at the heart of the band's very existence.

A biting wind blows through Hamburg as the band file into the Astra brewery earlier that day.

They've driven here from Belgium's Sonic City festival and, seven weeks into their current tour, are a little bleary-eyed. McGovern walks in looking like a cross between a member of the Baader-Meinhof gang and EastEnders' Dot Cotton. Dressed in a long coat and military fatigues, he's wrapped a scarf over his head


"It was four days after my friend's passing that we named ourselves and the end of that month that we played our first show as The Murder Capital."
James McGovern

"Do you think I've gone too short?" Tuit (left) and McGovern share hair tips.

and a pair of black sunglasses remain on for the duration of our conversation. He sits down and rests his head on guitarist Cathal Roper's shoulder and for a while it's unclear whether he's awake or not.

McGovern, Roper and amiable, curly-haired guitarist Damien Tuit first started playing together when they were in college in Dublin, their early gigs billed as the singer's solo project. "I remember we played a club night and walking in and seeing 'James McGovern' on the screen. I just thought: 'Fuck this. I hate this,'" he recalls. "After a while we just realised that we were a band. The name The Murder Capital came slamming into my brain and we all loved it."

Days later, in February last year, McGovern's closest friend unexpectedly took his own life. "When my friend passed away it garnered meaning," he says. "It was four days after his passing that we named ourselves and the end of that month that we played our first show as The Murder Capital."

When I Have Fears first creaks then thunders into life with For Everything, a pummelling, stark vision of McGovern cut loose and flailing in his own grief. As he puts it "brutally honest", its lyrics contain The Murder Capital's mission statement. That there might be: "the possibility of symphony within my tragedy." Though the LP isn't all about the suicide of McGovern's friend, death's shadow hangs over almost every note. Chipper bassist Gabriel Blake lost his mother to cancer during the recording and each song is an examination – either directly or indirectly – of loss, pain and grief.

Green & Blue is inspired by the lonely, monochrome portraits of US photographer Francesca Woodman who took her own life aged 22, while Don't Cling To Life, written after Blake's mother died, takes the finality of death as an opportunity to cherish the present. "It's the reality that what you have is now, but it will go," says McGovern. "Maybe for some people that's depressing, but to me it's living." The band insist they wanted to capture "the complete range of human experience", but it can at times make for heavy listening.

You'd be forgiven, then, for expecting The Murder Capital to be equally dour company. Thoughtful, yes. Serious, frequently. But the five friends are also warm, generous and open. They talk about music in visual terms (Blake told producer Flood he wanted his bass to sound like "a Toyota Corolla on a car ferry at sea with its engine running") and for a group of men in their early 20s are refreshingly frank about conveying their feelings to one another. Whatever they've been through together over the last two years has created a close, supportive unit. If you were going through a rough time, you'd want friends like these.

"We're at our best when we're most understanding and compassionate with each other," nods Tuit. "In the same way that in the '60s and '70s there was a sexual revolution, I think we're in the middle of an emotional revolution, especially in males."

"If we didn't do it then some of us wouldn't be here. I wouldn't be able to live if I wasn't able to have the people around me that I do and the forms of expression that we have. The creation and all that release," adds McGovern, matter-of-factly. "All I needed was to be shown that there are people out there who want to help. There are friends who want to talk to you. I've been lucky with the friends that I've had, but it's a lottery."

The next morning, McGovern and Tuit leave early ahead of the rest of the band to attend a radio session in Berlin. They all reconvene later at an army surplus store for a spot of shopping. Roper has picked up a canvas satchel, drummer Diarmuid Brennan a balaclava, while their merch guy is now proudly sporting a pair of bright pink combat trousers. They stop off for burgers and chips underneath the U-Bahn before a quick stroll along the Spree. As his bandmates slope off to tonight's venue, McGovern ducks into an invitingly dingy bar and orders a Johnnie Walker Black Label and ginger ale. »

In the crowd: McGovern and guitarist Cathal Roper entertain the moshpit in Hamburg's Molotov Music Club.

Lay your hands on me: McGovern puts his back into it, Berlin's Musik & Frieden venue, 13 November; (below) the singer gets close to bassist Gabriel Blake.

Capital gains: "We want to capture the complete range of human experience," says the band.

"In the same way that in the '60s and '70s there was a sexual revolution, I think we're in the middle of an emotional revolution, especially in males." Damien Tuit

McGovern's dark hair is cropped close to the skull. He's tall, broad shouldered and the fingers of both hands are heavy with chunky silver rings. From afar he could be a hired thug in an episode of Peaky Blinders, but there's a solitary quietness to the singer. He'd make a good Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights, brooding over the windy moors.

McGovern, 24, grew up in Cork, visiting his sound engineer father in Dublin at weekends. It was a creative upbringing, he had friends in bands and would sometimes bunk off school to graffiti the town centre, at night playing "emo, shitty acoustic music" in his room. Sometimes he'll take the 40-minute bus ride back home from Dublin just to stare out at the sea and mull things over.

He's in a buoyant mood today though, cackling with a throaty rasp, but concedes that dredging up painful memories onstage six nights a week can take its toll. "A lot of the subject matter is quite dark and personal and some days it's almost unbearable," he says. "It is sometimes difficult to be pulling those memories off the shelf every night. It can be cathartic, but it can also be a lead weight."

Due to the frankness of their songs, people frequently come up to the band after gigs and it can feel like they know McGovern on a deep, personal level. "I'm like, 'Hi, I'm James...' and they say, 'I KNOW!'" he laughs, "OK... sorry."

McGovern and his bandmates take what The Murder Capital do and say very seriously and as such he's anxious to clarify something he said the previous day about them not being here without the creative outlet of the band. "It's unfair to family and friends to say something like that. What I mean is, my head would be a very, very dark place if it weren't allowed to express and create in the way that I've been afforded and with the chances of having met the people that I have," he stresses. "I think I would have always ended up being creative, but who fucking knows, man."

McGovern believes that his friend might still be with us had he been able to simply afford professional help. He wants The Murder Capital to lead by example to a certain extent, to show people that you can share your pain and let others know how you feel. Though it was never their aim, by writing about their own troubles the band are increasingly finding that they're helping other people process theirs. Something positive has come out of all that trauma.

"It's hard to think of it that way but at times you do," he says. "I would throw all of this away to have those people back, but what we have now is what we have now so I'm certainly not going to take it for granted."

A long pause follows. "Sorry," he grins. "I was just trying not to cry."

That night, McGovern stalks the stage like a lairy doorman looking for trouble. He glowers and bats a tambourine in-between puffs on a cigarette. Three songs in the band hit On Twisted Ground, the singer's emotionally broken goodbye to his "dearest friend". Though quiet and muted, it comes like a punch in the gut and in the packed room you can hear a pin drop as the band turn to hug each other after it ends. "I'll never take my friends for granted again," he announces and there's the sound of slow panting into the microphone before the set revs back into gear. McGovern dives into the crowd once more and as closer Feeling Fades comes to a piledriving climax, Brennan boots his drumkit across the stage and they all walk off; a band of brothers with their hearts worn unashamedly on their sleeves. The crowd still stand in place after they've gone: stunned, elated and some blinking back tears. It may have been a torturous path, but The Murder Capital have succeeded in finding symphony within tragedy.

THE DUBLINERS

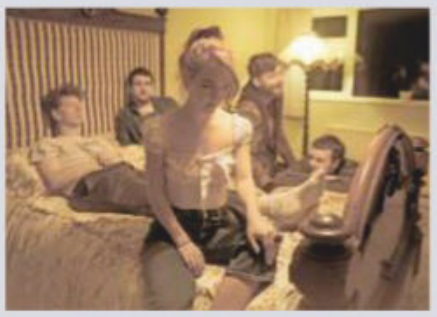
Following the success of The Murder Capital and Fontaines D.C., here's four more acts to investigate from the Irish capital's thriving live scene.

Silverbacks

Untangle Dublin five-piece Silverbacks' knotty art-rock and you'll find traces of Parquet Courts, Pavement and fellow countrymen Girl Band's ear-splitting noise, but their unsettled, snarky spirit is all their own.
Get This Track: Pink Tide

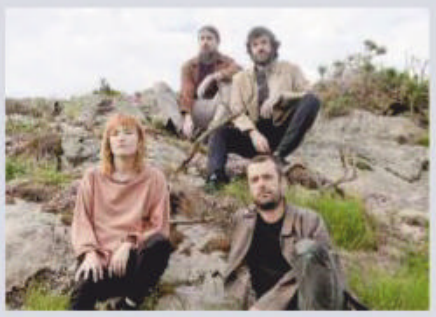
Thumper

Bubblegum pop hooks and ragged guitar noise collide on Thumper's bratty, frenetic punk rock. Long a favourite on Dublin's live circuit, they released their debut EP, Out Of Body Auto-Message, earlier this year.
Get This Track: AFL



Just Mustard

Dundalk's Just Mustard share The Murder Capital's fondness for dark atmospherics, though they present theirs as part of a less brutal, more dream-pop leaning soundworld, as evinced on self-released debut LP, Wednesday.
Get This Track: Seven



Lankum

Like The Pogues before them, over three albums Dublin's Lankum have shown that traditional Irish folk music can be both relevant to today and imbued with a ferocious, punk rock spirit.
Get This Track: The Wild Rover

PHIL SMITHIES, ELLIUS GRACE

30. Edwyn Collins
Badbea

The Backstory: A debilitating stroke in 2005 has not stopped the ex-Orange Juice leader's solo career going from strength to strength.
The Clincher: Recorded in his studio in his ancestral home of Helmsdale, Badbea finds Collins upbeat and defiant, the singer looking back at his past with a wry nod while still living very much in the moment. That "punky sneer" of old may have softened, but Collins's sense of joy remains unbridled.
What They Say: "I'm a songwriter and a musician, so that's what you do. Write songs and make records. Crack on."
Key Track: It All Makes Sense To Me. *SM*

29. Foals
Everything Not Saved Will Be Lost – Part 1

The Backstory: Over a decade and four LPs, the Oxford band have transformed from skittish dance-punks into a muscular rock band. A bold two-album project set out to seal the deal.
The Clincher: Expanding their fifth record into two releases offered thrilling scope for exploration. Here, synth bangers and festival-ready singalongs sit happily alongside experimental, proggy jams.
What They Say: "All the post-millennial dread everybody's swimming in is very much present." Yannis Philippakis
Key Track: On The Luna. *ND*

28

Vampire Weekend
Father Of The Bride

The Backstory: It had been six years since the New York outfit's last record and things had changed: they were no longer a band based in New York and were, instead, more of a project centred around the now-LA-based leader Ezra Koenig. Would the creative reset pay off?
The Clincher: Their frenetic indie-rock sound is left behind on the East Coast. Working with producer Ariel Rechtshaid, Koenig ushers in a looser, rootsier approach, heavy on warm melodies and free-spirited collaborations.
What They Say: "Vampire Weekend is still a band, it's now just a very large band." Ezra Koenig
Key Track: Harmony Hall. *ND*

Vampire Weekend's Ezra Koenig: "looser, rootsier, free-spirited..."

27. Sleater-Kinney
The Center Won't Hold

The Backstory: Gaining a star producer, losing a drummer and dividing fans, rock's feminist heroines staked everything on the future.
The Clincher: Partly inspired by the suppression of women's voices under Trump, the band and producer St. Vincent make themselves unignorable with jagged synths, punk-funk energy and a spirit of flinty defiance. The music will outlast the gossip.
What They Say: "That was our power-grab for this record. How can we become larger than we are? How can we take up more space?" Corin Tucker
Key Track: Hurry On Home. *DL*

26. Mac DeMarco
Here Comes The Cowboy

The Backstory: A cult hero known for a knack of turning the schmaltzy into the profound, how would Mac DeMarco's stoner, experimental indie-rock fare when it became even more mellow?
The Clincher: So relaxed it's almost horizontal, on his fourth album a meandering DeMarco comes over like a woozy Elton John, his introspective folk ditties combining classic '70s-style songwriting with his own idiosyncratic charm.
What They Say: "It's like... a festival record? No, no, no. It's slower and softer."
Key Track: On The Square. *LC*

25. Thom Yorke
Anima

The Backstory: With his Tomorrow's Modern Boxes tour established as an ongoing concern, the Radiohead singer's solo career is beginning to feel less extra-curricular and more like a different division of the same operation.
The Clincher: Coming across like a "we told you so" sequel to OK Computer, Anima is a record steeped in digitised dread, Yorke trying to make sense of the modern world through a maze of glitchy electronica.
What They Say: "For some reason, I thought a really good way of expressing anxiety creatively was in a dystopian environment."
Key Track: Not The News. *ND*

24. Bill Callahan
Shepherd In A Sheepskin Vest

The Backstory: Since Bill Callahan's last record, 2013's Dream River, the Austin, Texas-based balladeer has lost his mother, got married and had a child.
The Clincher: Domesticity appears to suit him, as Shepherd In A Sheepskin Vest unfolds across 20 wry country-folk songs that zoom in on the everyday circle of life as if in search of some universal cosmic truth. Callahan's longest, warmest album to date.
What They Say: "I had been away for so long, I wanted to give people a double record."
Key Track: Son Of The Sea. *SM*

23. Bruce Springsteen
Western Stars

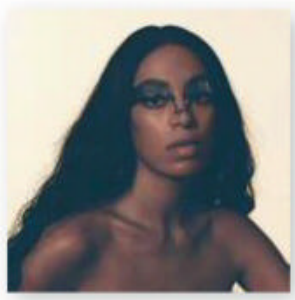
The Backstory: In his downtime away from The E Street Band, Springsteen assembled his best set of songs in years.
The Clincher: Echoing the Californian sound of the late '60s, Springsteen creates an orchestral pop classic. The characters in the songs – the faded cowboy actor of the title track, the busted-up stand-in of Drive Fast (The Stuntman) – are vividly drawn.
What They Say: "These narrative short stories... it's a way of exposing your own inner life and struggles, but you're writing all the details of someone else's life."
Key Track: Western Stars. *TD*

22. Bon Iver i,i

The Backstory: After the dense, glitchy electronic experimentation of 2016's 22, A Million, elusive Wisconsin native Justin Vernon welcomed the melody and heart back into his sonic adventures.
The Clincher: The fourth Bon Iver record reins in some of its predecessor's cryptic edge, but expands the band into a wider collective involving a cast of dozens recording in rural Texas. The aching Hey, Ma is lyrically oblique and moving at the same time, while Moses Sumney and Bruce Hornsby join him on the gospel-y U (Man Like).
What They Say: "The big thing with this album is about me trying to not hold on so tight."
Key Track: Hey, Ma. *TD*

21. Caroline Polachek Pang

The Backstory: Born from an aborted songwriting session for Katy Perry, Pang represents the first full-length collaboration between Polachek and PC Music alumnus Danny Harle. It traces the dissolution of Polachek's marriage, and her revival.
The Clincher: Polachek wanted to replicate the adrenaline rushes she was experiencing while making the album, and succeeded: synthetic yet airy, the immensely visceral Pang plays trampoline with your heart and serves up enough neon hooks and dazzling vocal acrobatics to populate your dream Top 40.
What They Say: "No interludes, no feats."
Key Track: Pang. *LS*



20. Solange
When I Get Home

The Backstory: Solange Knowles digs back into memories of growing up in Houston, Texas.
The Clincher: At first, When I Get Home sounds a bit slight: repetitive vocal hooks laid over jazzy electronica. But this is a record that slowly, undeniably reveals itself to be a masterpiece of hypnotic mantras and '70s Stevie Wonder-style synth moves.
What They Say: "With this album I had so much to feel. Words would have been reductive to what I needed to feel and express. It's in the sonics for me."
Key Track: Down With The Clique. *TD*

RACHAEL WRIGHT

19. Big Thief U.F.O.F.

The Backstory: The name Adrianne Lenker tends to be uttered with reverence in indie music circles – as the heart of Brooklyn's Big Thief, her songs are marked by emotional heft and keen storytelling, not to mention the heart-twist of her voice.
The Clincher: On U.F.O.F., Big Thief find a new looseness without ever losing their intimacy, playing with textures and perspectives to create something hypnotic.
What They Say: "I don't think we've hit a point yet where we've had to make our rebellion record... but in a way, I do think this album is doing that." Adrianne Lenker
Key Track: Cattails. *LB*

18. Joan Shelley Like The River Loves The Sea

The Backstory: Over the course of five albums, Joan Shelley has become one of US folk's most accomplished songwriters.
The Clincher: Decamping to Iceland to record, Shelley loses nothing of her Kentucky fried sound, but this time embraces a raw power strong enough to knock you out. Lyrically, she pitches herself as Americana's own David Attenborough, embracing the natural world with wisdom, grace and respect.
What They Say: "Like The River Loves The Sea is built as a haven for overstimulated heads in uncertain times."
Key Track: Teal. *LC*

17. Lee "Scratch" Perry Rainford

The Backstory: The 83-year-old reggae eccentric has shown little sign of hanging up his jewel-encrusted "magic boots" any time soon, having released an LP every year for the past decade.
The Clincher: Rainford is Scratch's best solo record in over 40 years. Producer Adrian Sherwood builds an array of textured, lolloping grooves over which Perry free-associates about playing cricket on the moon, banishing evil spirits and reminiscing on his own legacy.
What They Say: "I wanted to try to get both the serious and mischievous sides of Lee." Adrian Sherwood
Key Track: Autobiography Of The Upsetter. *SM*

16. Tyler, The Creator Igor

The Backstory: After showcasing new sounds on 2017's Grammy-nominated album Flower Boy, the LA rapper takes a sonic deep dive on his most heartfelt record yet.
The Clincher: It's testament to the slick brilliance of Igor that you barely even notice cameos from Kanye, Pharrell et al; here, Tyler, The Creator is the master protagonist. Igor is relentlessly good, twisting and turning through dirty basslines, pop ditties and neo-soul as the rapper laments unrequited love for his "favourite garçon."
What They Say: "It's like I didn't even make this album, I'm such a fan of it."
Key Track: I Think. *HF*

15. Kevin Morby Oh My God

The Backstory: After four albums of rollicking indie, the Kansas City native started dabbling with the divine as a distraction from the general awfulness of real life.
The Clincher: The spirits of Bob Dylan and Jesus Christ loom large over this quasi-religious offering, with churchy piano and gospel sounds refracted through the gaze of a non-believer. Biblical, some might say.
What They Say: "I want someone to be able to listen to it – or me to be able to listen to it – in 2036, and maybe even be able to forget this time. With the hope that things have gotten a lot better."
Key Track: OMG Rock N Roll. *LC*

14. Dave Psychodrama

The Backstory: A major talent-in-waiting since the age of 16, the South London MC's compelling debut elevated UK rap to another level.
The Clincher: Framed as a personal therapy session, Dave's mould-breaking, Mercury-winning reality check unpacks the modern urban psyche with devastating precision and emotionally-charged production – masterminded by Stormzy collaborator Fraser T Smith.
What They Say: "Psychodrama allowed me to get a lot off my chest. It allowed me to become the person that I wanted to live up to being."
Key Track: Streatham. *RH*

13. Sharon Van Etten Remind Me Tomorrow

The Backstory: In the five years since her last album, the New Jersey singer-songwriter gave birth to her first child, guested in Netflix's The OA and studied to become a mental health counsellor. Sonically, she decided to shake things up, too.
The Clincher: Remind Me Tomorrow retools Van Etten's sound in '80s synths and urgent breakbeats, a perfectly-pitched balance of jubilant choruses and atmospheric ballads.
What They Say: "You only have so many options on guitar and I felt like I kept writing the same song over and over again."
Key Track: Comeback Kid. *ND*

12. Jessica Pratt Quiet Signs

The Backstory: Definitively shedding her freak-folk label, the Los Angeles singer-songwriter broadened her horizons without diminishing her mystery.
The Clincher: Ditching home recording for professional studio, Pratt still made her third album sound as if it came from the back of a wardrobe: intimate, hushed, one where Tropicalia, Broadway musical and '60s pop were playing on constant loop. Lean in.
What They Say: "When I think of the last record *[2015's On Your Own Love Again]* now, it does seem extremely frenetic; wound up and anxious. Quiet Signs is a lot more earthy; a slow-wave."
Key Track: This Time Around. *VS*

11

ANDREW WHITTON

Slowthai
Nothing Great About Britain

The Backstory: Wild-eyed upstart launched himself out of Middle England to bring thrilling state-of-the-nation address.

The Clincher: Like a sodium-lit joyride through UK subcultures that swerves through grime, hip-hop and moshpit-ready bangers, slowthai's deep dive into his conflicted past provides an exhilarating, nightmarish snapshot of Brexit Britain.

What They Say: "I want to make music to separate this generation from the last. For kids similar to myself, that have come from a place where they feel lost."

Key Track: Inglorious. *RH*

Q&A: The Northampton rapper on a breakthrough 2019.

Nothing Great About Britain had a real edge to it. Did the response take you by surprise?

"Just finishing the album and releasing it and seeing a physical copy was crazy enough. Obviously I intended for it to provoke conversations, but when people started reacting to it the way they did, that was the best reward ever."

It's quite an angry record, but you always come across as chilled out. Who's the real slowthai?

"Obviously we all have bad times, but I'm aways trying to have a positive outlook. I mean, life's a journey where you're trying to find yourself. I'm constantly learning new things about myself and about my perspective on the world."

Is that what you mean when you refer to yourself as a "lost kid"?

"I'm always going to be a lost kid. The moment I lose that 'kid' way of thinking and grow up, everything will come to an end."

You've told the Queen and Boris Johnson what you think of them. Is there anyone else you want to have a pop at?

"Not off the top of my head! I'm on a peaceful path at the minute. I don't know if I'm calming down or whatever. Though I would take a pop at anyone who didn't register to vote. There was one kid on Twitter telling me, 'I don't do politics' or some bullshit and I'm like, 'You are the problem.' If something pisses me off, I've got to speak my mind."

Obviously everyone's excited for a sequel. Do you know what your next album will be about?

"I've already got the idea. I've got track titles, cover ideas. I've been recording already, just getting in the swing of things. I know what I want to say. But really it has to make me feel good inside. It has to make me feel something. Like I said, it's about the energy. It's what you put into things that counts." *RUPERT HOWE* »

slowthai: there was something great about his debut.

Angel Olsen, in reflective mood, Brooklyn, New York, 20 November, 2019.

The Greatest Love Of All

Angel Olsen's majestic All Mirrors was written through the stress and insecurity of a relationship breakdown. Then, she realised, she was just where she needs to be. "As it turns out," she tells Laura Barton, "I like being alone."

Photography: Guy Eppel

10

Angel Olsen All Mirrors

The Backstory: After swapping lo-fi indie-folk for punchy pop confections on her last LP, the Missourian singer broke out of her box once again.

The Clincher: Swirling together Roy Orbison-style melancholy, vintage synth sounds, mid-century musical melodrama and acerbic alt-rock heroine bite, All Mirrors eloquently raked over the remains of a soured romance via expansive, experimental songwriting that felt both eerily old-fashioned and startlingly novel.

What They Say: "I'm not saying I've experienced the most loss, but I think I'm pretty fucking good at describing a sad thing."

Key Track: Lark. *RA*

Winter has come early to Detroit. All along Woodward Avenue and Washington Boulevard, snow lies in great white banks and the city has taken on a muffled sound beneath the sharp blue sky. In a basement dressing room at the Royal Oak Music Theatre, Angel Olsen looks under the weather, the combination, she explains, of a burgeoning cold and the lingering effects of aftershow revelry in Chicago the previous evening. She sits slightly hunched on a small leather sofa, her skin pale, her eye make-up smudged, that famously incandescent voice lacking its lustre.

Olsen is toward the end of the first leg of the promotional tour for her fourth album All Mirrors, almost 30 dates across North America, from New Orleans to Brooklyn, San Diego to Salt Lake City. Early in the new year it will bring her to the UK and Europe. "I miss it," she says kindly. "It's cosy being in Europe in winter."

The art of touring this album has taken some finessing. All Mirrors' opulent sound and Scott Walker-esque production has required the hiring of classically trained musicians, extensive rehearsals and the purchase of a mellotron. "It's like, how do you get a 13-piece string sound in a live band without 13 strings?" she posits, and explains the process as if reeling off the frequent flier's favourite packing tips.

Harder to neatly fold has been the album's emotional enormity. It's a voluminous record, capturing a turbulent period in Olsen's life when the success of 2016's My Woman had led to a demanding promotional schedule and, simultaneously, her relationship began to fall apart. It was a time she recalls as "trying to keep my head above water and to have a good time for that hour every day we were playing."

"The hardest part *[of being a woman in the music industry]* is dating a guy and having them understand that your career is important to you and that it requires a lot of space."

Divine intervention: Angel Olsen with Bonnie "Prince" Billy in 2011.

But offstage she was floundering. "I was having a rough time, and I was being really strict about my eating, and I was drinking a lot..." Still, as the accolades flooded in and the tour grew longer, it took a while for people to realise she was not flourishing. "Friends were texting me, 'You look great!'" she remembers. "I guess this is what happens when you don't take care of yourself – people tell you that you look great."

In the quiet moments beyond the compliments and the congratulations, Olsen felt a growing realisation: "I needed to deal with a lot of stuff," she says. "And I needed to be alone to deal with it. So I had to figure out how to do that."

She returned to her home in Asheville, North Carolina, broke up with her partner, changed manager and set off on a solo tour across Australia, the US West Coast and Europe. The aloneness she had craved was dazzling at first; there was a 15-minute soundcheck each day, an hour's set, and the rest of the time wholly her own. She took long walks, read avidly and began writing – "not lyrics, but journalling, stuff about the trips, using that as a therapy."

When the tour was over, she took three months off. It was strange to return then to Asheville. It is a small, close community, home still to her ex, yet Olsen felt it was where she belonged. "I really loved Asheville and fell in love with it again and realised that I didn't hate it, I didn't want to leave it; I just hated what was happening and so I kind of found my own place there again and started to feel more connected to it than I ever had." She relishes the solitude the city offers. "And I really love the nature of it and the feeling that every time when I land it's like I'm home and I've never felt that about a place ever really."

Olsen grew up in St Louis, Missouri, adopted as a toddler by the family who had fostered her since shortly after her birth. Her parents were notably older than those of her peers, and she has eight considerably older siblings, an upbringing that gave her the independence of an only child and a fascination with the culture of earlier decades. While she is close to her parents, her feelings towards St Louis are still unsettled. "It's really dark," she says. "It's similar to Detroit or Baltimore, it's a tough city. There's still a lot of racism and weird energy."

It was not an easy place to spend her adolescence. She learned piano and guitar, rehearsed her songs into a Panasonic tape recorder, but found no real musical outlet in the city. "There wasn't much of a music scene and people didn't really move their bodies at shows, they were very stiff," she remembers. "I feel like people don't know how to interact in the audience at shows there because they just don't go to shows as often."

She senses it has changed since the Ferguson riots of 2014. "It's a very different scene and culture, I think it is changing," she says. "But I left when I was 19 so I didn't grow up there in those formative years. Chicago was where I feel like I had to figure a lot of things out – and Chicago was tough too, because it's cold, and the first winter I lived there I was sick four times just from underdressing."

The previous evening was in fact the first time Olsen had returned to Chicago and not felt the uneasy presence of its ghosts. After her last significant break-up she had unceremoniously fled the city. "I didn't really handle the situation well," she explains. "I just kind of ran away and didn't tell anyone." Ever since it has been an emotionally freighted stop on her tour schedule. "Any time I came to Chicago I used to get so riddled with anxiety because it would be flashbacks to that period of time in my life and that reality and undealt-with stuff and feelings and thoughts," she says. Last night, however, was different. "Last night I didn't have any anxiety at all." »

GETTY

“One day I’m going to stop and take a break, a long break”: Angel Olsen, November 2019.

Olsen hits her purple patch, Stubb's Bar-B-Q, Austin, Texas, 7 November, 2019.

As much as All Mirrors depicts a difficult time in Olsen's life, it also describes the process of growing into herself. Many of the songs address being alone – often in opposition to being with another, among them the post-break-up track Tonight. Olsen smiles. "That one specifically, it's more about not hating someone any more and not needing them either – not even needing to talk about them or think about them." She recalls how during its recording, producer John Congleton described the track as "such a burn".

She looks quietly satisfied. "It's a burn to get a drunk shitty voicemail from your ex," she says, "but it's even more of a burn to just be like, 'I don't really think about you or need you any more. It's so weird – since you've been gone, it's been awesome!'" A formality returns briefly to her face. "But I feel like that's so evil," she says, "because I feel on pretty good terms with my ex-partner."

For a time, though, she wanted revenge. She describes the dog days of the relationship – the nitpicking, the gaslighting. "And I needed to get to a place where I didn't even want any *[revenge]*, I just was forgiving," she says. "They're finding their way, and it's not all about me, and that's fine."

A little colour has returned to Olsen's face now. "People," she says, "are always asking, 'How does it feel to be a woman in the music industry?' And I hate myself for saying it, but the hardest part of it is dating a guy and having them understand that *[your career]* is important to you and that it requires a lot of space." It's a subject she tackles on the album's first single, Lark. "If you're not strong, and if you don't trust people easily, and you have a lot of stuff to work on, it's probably not the best idea to date someone who's a woman musician," she says. "Because she's going to be gone, and around all kinds of people, and working with men – because men make up most of the industry. So that's, I feel, the hardest part of it."

Olsen was in her 20s when she started singing professionally, gaining attention as a backing band member for Bonnie "Prince" Billy, and in 2012 launching her solo career. Some days it feels like a long

GETTY

haul. "I keep telling myself that one day I'm going to stop and take a break, like a long break," she says. "Because sometimes I'm just in it so deep and I am like, 'When am I going to have my life back?' And before I know it I'll be in my 40s, 50s and I'll have been on tour for ever."

For a long time what kept Olsen out on the road was the fear that "people can lose interest". The months she spent touring solo after My Woman shifted this – as she delved deep into her back catalogue each night, she saw at close range what her songs meant to her audiences. "There was something really powerful about realising I am where I am and I'm able to be an independent woman who lives alone in a house that I bought because these people have listened to my songs and come to my shows for all this time."

The old songs sometimes feel funny to her now. "When I was doing the solo stuff, it was almost like covering somebody else's work," she says and smiles and tilts her head. "I don't love a lot of the way I used to write songs. I can tell that the way I wrote was really poetically calculated so when people request certain songs I'm like, 'OK but that song sucks!'" One day she imagines she will look back on these new songs with the same disdain. "I'm still experimenting with writing," she says. "Somehow I don't have the time or words to describe things as poetically as I did when I was 22. I feel like Impasse *[on the new album]* is like a very direct song, whereas if I had written it when I was in my 20s it might not be."

She would like to try writing in the third person "and create these beautiful whimsical lines" like Jessica Pratt. "I love listening to her. But listening to her is like listening to a '70s quilt that your grandma gave you; that's what her voice reminds me of and she's very good at it."

Sometimes Olsen thinks about doing something else. A Broadway show, perhaps, or writing a memoir. For a while she contemplated going into editing and production "because I loved nerding out about that stuff." But then she had a realisation: "Just because you love an Italian panini doesn't mean you should open a panini bar."

Sometimes she imagines giving it all up entirely. "In the past I've thought I'd be married with a child or something and have more of a traditional trajectory," she says, giving a slow smile. "That eventually some lucky guy out there would take me away from the stage. But as it turns out, I like being alone. It feels really good. I think I'm suddenly facing the idea that no one's going to rescue me. It's just you." It has been a process of leaving, losing and learning, but at last Angel Olsen has come back to herself.

"There's something really powerful about realising I am able to be an independent woman who lives alone in a house that I bought because these people have listened to my songs and come to my shows for all this time."

Fallen Angel: but she'll get right back up any second.

9

Billie Eilish
When We All Fall Asleep, Where Do We Go?

The Backstory: The SoundCloud sensation that her fellow teenagers worshipped became the no-bullshit pop star that everybody loved.
The Clincher: Spurning the standard-issue hitmakers and guest spots, Eilish and her brother Finneas O'Connell hunkered down in their LA bedrooms to create a bitingly intimate and unfiltered form of pop music that made the rest of the Top 40 sound glib. From sardonic bangers to skeletal ballads, it was the acme of Gen-Z disaffection.
What They Say: "You're the only one doing anything fucking *interesting* nowadays." Thom Yorke
Key Track: Bad Guy. *DL*

Billie Eilish: "a no-bullshit pop star."

8

Fontaines D.C. Dogrel

The Backstory: Book-smart Dubliners make their adopted hometown the setting for a set of rabble-rousing punk rock.

The Clincher: As poetic as their literary heroes and this year's most vital sounding debut album, Dogrel was a stirring, Dublin drizzle-soaked triumph on every level.

What They Say: "The muse of the album was the fundamental existential issues of humans expressed through the language of Dublin city." Grian Chatten, frontman

Key Track: Too Real. *CC*

Poets' corner: Fontaines D.C. (Grian Chatten, second left).

7

Gore blimey: Weyes Blood, aka Natalie Mering – "a vital voice for our times."

GETTY, GUY EPPEL

Weyes Blood Titanic Rising

The Backstory: Vintage-pop singer-songwriter Natalie Mering takes an ambitious leap forwards, proving herself a vital voice for our times.

The Clincher: Climate emergency doom, the search for true love and worldwide uncertainty are hardly topics ripe for turning into lush, avant-garde pop. But Mering takes her anxieties and envelops them in melodies so gorgeous you could listen 1000 times over and still adore.

What They Say: "I don't wanna make something depressing, I wanna make something sorrowful, because I think in a lot of ways people are mourning these changes that are happening."

Key Track: Something To Believe. *HF* »

6

Another hard day at the office for Fat White Family.

Fat White Family
Serfs Up!

The Backstory: Peckham's most debauched ne'er-do-wells moved to Sheffield in an attempt to become ever so slightly less debauched. But what kind of third album could be pulled from the wreckage?
The Clincher: Undoubtedly their finest work to date, Serfs Up! saw Fat White Family embrace sweeping, Boney M disco and glammy electronica, as well as creepy, sax-led jizz-jazz on the prowling Vagina Dentata.
What They Say: "We were listening to Yeezus by Kanye West and just boshing loads of ketamine because we'd stopped taking proper drugs." Lias Saoudi, singer
Key Track: Feet. *LC*

5

Nick Cave: "reaching out into the unknowable."

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds
Ghosteen

The Backstory: Shaped by unthinkable tragedy – the death of Nick Cave's son Arthur – this record navigated a world transformed by grief with profound love and deep wonder.
The Clincher: Cave's ability to handle the mysteries of existence has never been in doubt, but the ineffably beautiful Ghosteen – songs often vibrating with pure visionary power – stood as remarkable testament to his quest to reach out into the unknowable, to bear witness to a world beyond understanding.
What They Say: "Ghosteen is a migrating spirit." Nick Cave
Key Track: Ghosteen Speaks. *VS*

GETTY, MICHAEL CLEMENT

4

Little Simz
Grey Area

The Backstory: Her third album in four years, this was ferociously unfiltered London rapper Simbi Ajikawo's sucker punch to the mainstream and it hit outrageously hard.

The Clincher: Bold and uncompromising, Grey Area straddled the line between bravado and fragility, with a revelatory Simz throwing powerful bars over jazz-rooted beats and letting everyone know she was "a boss in a fucking dress."

What They Say: "At the time I was writing, I was in a very confusing headspace. Everything was in this weird area, and it was all a shade of grey."

Key Track: Selfish. *LC*

Little Simz: "ferociously unfiltered."

GIANANDREA TRAINA

Q&A: Little Simz on keeping it real and going off-grid.

Congratulations, Simz, Grey Area is one of Q's albums of the year. Why do you think it struck such a chord with people?

"Wow. Sometimes I ask myself the same thing! Haha. I think it has something to do with maybe its honesty, the realness in it. It just opened me up a bit, all the musicality and different styles. There's things on there that everyone can relate to."

You've just come back from touring South America, how was that?

"I was playing a few festivals in Brazil and Chile – it was wicked, man. I love South America. I went out there with Gorillaz last year so to come back a year later and do my own thing with my band was a really nice vibe. São Paulo's such a special place."

What's been the craziest thing about your year?

"I think when I got shortlisted for the Mercurys was a real moment for me. Plus, when I sold out my tour I was like, 'OK, people are listening. This isn't just in my head!' Being recognised by Q too *[Simz won Best Vocal Performance at this year's awards]* was a realisation I was being respected and acknowledged by critics which was a first for me really."

What will you be doing for Christmas?

"I'm taking *a break*. Haha. Definitely. I'm going to be off-grid. I'll still be around in London but nobody will be able to contact me. I just want to chill because I've been on the move so much this year that I need to just sit and reflect on everything that I've done because it's gone so quick I've forgotten what I did! I want to get myself in the right headspace for next year. To reset, and get ready to go again."

SIMON McEWEN

»

3

Aldous Harding
Designer

The Backstory: Cut-above folkie becomes genuine iconoclast on album three: moving to Wales after working with John Parish, then abandoning literalism to create her own wild language.
The Clincher: Designer represents the singular vision of a wayward eccentric in the spirit of artists such as John Cale, Harding being one of the few artists wringing something new out of indie songwriting. Possessed of a huge and intriguing vocal range, she's as hypnotic here as in her reputation-making, bug-eyed live performances.
What They Say: "All the work is from my gut and then refined."
Key Track: The Barrel. *LS*

In The Corner, In Blue...

Every night, the supernaturally gifted singer-songwriter Aldous Harding brings her mind-blowing show to a new town. But only one person ever leaves disappointed. Ted Kessler joins Harding on tour to find out all about her unrealistically high standards.

Photography: Alex Lake

Through a glass darkly: Aldous Harding, Michelberger Hotel, Berlin, 20 November, 2019.

“What? Me, worry?!”: Aldous Harding, Berlin, 20 November 2019.

In the old days,

just as the singer-songwriter known as Aldous Harding prepared to go onstage, she would gather up all of the loose memories she might have seen drifting around the dressing room. Then she’d tuck all that energy, both positive and negative, away in a safe place for the duration of her performance.

“All the things you’ve said in your life, all the things you’ve done, they’re kind of floating around in the air like

"Unless somebody comes to me and says, 'I don't know how to describe what I saw but I am absolutely changed,' then I feel like I've failed."

gold flakes," she explains. "I'd suck them all up, roll them into one ball, put them in my pocket and walk out. I could do that."

That was then, though. Seven testing months of touring has diminished this particular skill. "Now, when I'm playing, the flakes are coming out of my pocket."

These flakes are not visible to the naked eye tonight in Berlin's Astra Kulturhaus, however, as Harding spins her nightly web of melody, menace, longing and magic. The 1500 souls in attendance are in quiet rapture throughout, the spell only broken once when, as Harding sits hunched over an acoustic guitar tenderly picking out the chords to Treasure, from her current album Designer, a lone voice cries out, "Please stand up, we can't see you!"

Immediately, a louder, more stridently German voice shoots back, "Leave her alone! She can do the hell she wants! We love you!"

And they do. The gravitational pull of Harding's performance is so intense that the atmosphere switches from jolly Berlin beer hall when the house lights are up to a place of devout worship as soon as she enters the darkened stage. Her four-piece band, including her partner Huw Evans, aka H Hawkline, play faultlessly. The sound is rich and stately. Her songs, like Weight Of The Planets or Imagining My Man, invade the space with dramatic mystery, while Harding, eyes on stalks, staring down the room, holds it all together with a voice of rich versatility, as quietly insistent as a plea for clemency one moment, as suddenly powerful as a caged bird the next. The applause is rapturous. The night is a triumph.

And yet...

Two hours later, around 1am, Aldous Harding approaches the steps of the Michelberger Hotel alongside her manager Martin Pike, protected against the frosty air in a huge wrap-around black duvet coat, looking absolutely devastated. She appears haunted, in pain even. What's happened?

"That was a disaster," she says, unbelievably. "I played terribly."

For a moment, it could be a joke, her humour is acutely dry and deadpan. She likes to put people on their back foot.

That moment passes. Her entire upper body – shoulders, face, lips – shrugs.

"We'll talk about it tomorrow," she says, with a little hug, before heading up the steps, into the hotel and off to bed.

Out in the corridors of the Michelberger Hotel, The Big Lebowski plays on screens to nobody on every floor. It is the kind of rules-are-there-to-be-broken establishment that also has an in-room TV channel devoted to running the Coen brothers' 1998 cult classic film on an infinite loop, too. In its Cosy Rooms there is a single duvet on a double bed and a large glass panel next to the bed that affords guests a view in and out from the toilet and shower at all times. Aldous Harding is in there right now.

"Is this what you want from me," she shouts, slamming the glass with her palm. "Trapped in this box for your magazine?!"

The camera clicks. Harding laughs. This is more like it. We head off for a coffee downstairs.

"Look," she says, as we wait for the lift. "I will tell you what's going on but I have to be careful."

She doesn't want to be trapped by this anecdote, forever being asked about it or have everything set against its context. Let's not make a drama out of a momentary crisis. Also, there's what happens in front of the curtain and what happens behind it. You can't show too much of behind without ruining the mystique out-front. "My mother was a puppeteer, I know this."

"I don't want it to be dark," she continues. "People say they want you to be honest, and real, and they use it in a way that is over-dramatic. I'm just a normal person going through normal things."

We get in the lift. We get out of the lift. It's the wrong floor. "We're as bad as each other," she says, sighing, taking the stairs instead.

Sitting at a back table in the hotel bar, she reveals what's up.

"I'm feeling quite emotional at the moment," she explains slowly, "because I am realising that I may not be eccentric, but I am very neurotic. And now that I don't drink there's nowhere to put that."

She hasn't had a drink – "with a few exceptions" – for two years. She wrote a song, I'm So Sorry, about this decision on her second album, 2017's glorious Party. "That was about the feeling of thinking you're winning when really you're losing, recognising it was booze."

Harding's neurosis manifests itself in ways that sound incompatible with being able to joyfully play to rooms full of strangers in different cities around the world. "I have unrealistic expectations of energy, and adoration. Unrealistic ideas of what makes me, or it, enough." She leans across the table, conspiratorially. "And some of these standards, they are a bit mad."

Here's an example. "Unless somebody comes to me and says, 'I don't know how to describe what I saw but I am absolutely changed,' unless somebody says *that* to me, then I feel like I've failed. If somebody comes up to me and says, 'Great show, I loved it.' I say, *[she pulls a revolted face and waving her hands-motion]*, 'Next.' Not that it doesn't matter, but I am looking for this other thing. It's like I'm washing my hands over and over again, then they are finally clean. And two minutes later I have to wash them again."

This sounds like an obsessive compulsive disorder.

"Well, yes. And also, I'm trying to do the impossible. Which is to play the perfect show every night, where there is all-round an understood energy every night. And unless I get that, I feel like I am »

going to die. To do that over and over, and not be able to change the way I work, maybe I am eccentric. Or maybe I am neurotic. Or maybe I am just an egotistical arse. But I wouldn't be able to do it otherwise. It's a faceless drive, but it's very strong."

She knows, too, where the drive is leading her.

"Part of me thinks that if I can do something remarkable then it will save me. But I'm getting the feeling that the quest for that could also have the opposite effect."

When having a coffee with Aldous Harding on her day off between shows, it's important to remember that you are having coffee with Hannah Harding, too.

Aldous Harding: lightning rod for the deepest, darkest emotional rescue across three albums, including the hexen-folk of her eponymous debut in 2014, Party's sparse goth-soul and Designer's cubist-pop and innervisions. A life-changing live experience. A poetic siren. Arty threads.

Hannah Harding: 29-year-old daughter of two divorced musicians, one a Canadian folk singer, performer and puppeteer called Lorina Harding who arrived in New Zealand in 1988 and brought up Hannah in various towns around the country. Eloquent, piercingly intelligent, with a tremendous turn of extreme phrase. Intense, touchy – although often just for comic effect (OR IS IT?) – and frequently hilarious. A great friend to animals.

Aldous is absolutely vital as a creative vessel for Hannah. She gives her art a focus, a home. Without her, we wouldn't be having this flat white in the bar of the Michelberger an hour before Hannah and Huw Evans catch a cab to the airport to meet up with their bandmates in Oslo ahead of tomorrow's show.

"There is a part of me that, for whatever reason, and so many people have it," she says, "that have the hope and the fear that they could be something, but also think that they could ultimately ruin it.

"I'm very lucky": with boyfriend and musical partner, Huw Evans, aka H Hawkline.

So, even though I have all these ideas and emotions and bursts of creativity, I never considered doing anything with them. Because I knew that ultimately I would drink myself to death in some old hotel where I wouldn't have to commit to love, or commit to rejection. I could eat my doughnut and die."

She nods.

"That's always how I felt. And I still feel like that now."

At 29, there is still plenty of time for this trajectory, she adds. "There's still part of me looking at the clock and packing, but I'm a bit braver than that it seems."

She wonders, suddenly, if other performers labour under similar weight of expectation around their performances. Not in my experience, no.

"You've worried me. Nobody has ever said, 'I have a voice inside that says if this isn't perfect I'm going to rip off your head and spit in the neck'?"

One wonders how Huw Evans copes with this neurosis? After all, he is onstage every night with her, playing the bass, a bit of keyboard, and is also at the hotel with her, on the bus with her, and in their shared home in Cardiff, being Hannah and Huw together. »

It'll be alright on the night: Harding and band, onstage at Berlin's Astra Kulturhaus, 2019.

SPREAD PICTURES

That's her in the spotlight: Aldous Harding reaches for the perfect gig live in Berlin, 20 November, 2019.

"Part of me thinks that if I can do something remarkable then it will save me. But I'm getting the feeling that the quest for that could also have the opposite effect."

ALDOUS HARDING

Now you see her...: the ever-elusive Aldous Harding, Berlin, November, 2019.

"I mean, it's private, but also I want to tell people how..."

Her eyes fill up and she turns from the table towards the large window, fanning her eyes.

"Here I go... how proud I am of him. And how he handles that. I'm very lucky. I was just thinking how much I love him and then I was overcome."

She takes a moment to consider how Evans feels coming offstage with the rest of the band each night, punching the air after a note-perfect performance to find her distraught and sobbing.

"He finds it frustrating, I think," she says, with understatement. "And I remind him if this was his music, H Hawkline stuff, he'd be the same. He knows there's no point ignoring the neurotic, so he nurtures the neurotic. He's very, very kind. But he is sometimes firm when he thinks it's interfering with our life. If I come offstage and I don't want to see anybody for three days because I am sitting there *[she puts her head in her hands]* going, 'I need to set an alarm in my head that reminds me of this bit' – Oh it goes this way, mate, it goes this way – he reminds me to get a grip."

She shrugs.

"Sometimes I laugh, and sometimes he dies." She looks at the cigarette pack on the table. "Should we go have a ciggy? Do you want to have a fag?"

Out in the courtyard, having a smoke, Harding considers what else makes her happy.

"One of my happiest memories was when my dog gave birth to a litter of puppies on my feet," she recalls. "I woke up and my dog had laid – laid! – laid some dogs overnight on me. I called for my mum and we sat there watching Phoebe clean up all her puppies. That was a thing to behold."

More regularly, she likes to get into pyjamas with her friends, or her band, climb into a hotel bed and watch films together. "I do their hair, we all shout, 'Eurgh!' at the movie, giggle. Because I was an only child, I like that sibling experience."

She has to think whether recording makes her happy, or whether she's plagued by the same hang-ups as she is with her live performance. Recording is different, she decides. It's too important to be either simply joyful or a neurotic chore.

"In order to make such big decisions, there are certain personalities that shouldn't get to speak at that time. It's like, 'Sorry. The adults are speaking. I don't want to hear it.' Recording is traumatic because it's final and uncertain."

It's also what makes the world go round. "When you ask people anywhere what means the most to them, they often say music. Yes, it's a job, but it's one of the most emotional and potentially healing things you can do. Sometimes it does feel like heart surgery. People can say, 'It's not heart surgery.' Well. That heart broke for a reason."

And when the recordings that she's made are out there in the world, doing good for people beyond her reach normally, then that makes her happy too. Designer, which she released in April, was the first of her albums to feature full band instrumentation, and this broader, warmer palette helped Aldous Harding escape any pigeon-holing as the witchy, Wuthering Heights thing that some were projecting on to her previously.

"I never listen to it, but when I think of Designer, I'm really proud, protective and content. It filled a good spot in music. In terms of bringing it to life every night... it's been a mixed bag. You win some and lose some. And when I lose it's like a pool ball in the stomach. But that's part of why next time you win."

She says she knew what she was doing then, "and I know what I'm doing now." To prove that, she's been ending the shows with a new song with a hypnotic rhythm, called Old Peel. "Did you like it?" she asks. I did.

"Did you hear the chorus?"

I did not hear it, so I can't remember it...

She looks aghast. "Mate. You just said, 'I could not hear, I do not remember it!' *[Puts on a stupid English accent]* 'I could not hear it, I do not remember it!' OK. I'll break it down for you."

Aldous Harding starts to sing Old Peel, banging out the rhythm on her chest like Matthew McConaughey in The Wolf Of Wall Street.

"'Old Peel, no deal, I won't speak if you call me, baby'..."

"So," she continues, waving a finger as she explains the lyric, "it's like a strong lady. No deal. If you call me, I'm not gonna say anything. Yeah? Get it? It's a combination of The Clash and Shocking Blue. It's got attitude. I thought that sounded sexy as hell. If one person, me, feels and says, 'Oh, that's sexy,' there's no way I'm going to be the only person who finds it sexy. And that's as easy as it is."

"When you ask people anywhere what means the most to them, they often say music. Sometimes it does feel like heart surgery. People can say it's not heart surgery. Well. That heart broke for a reason."

We go to find Huw Evans, who is with their bags in reception. He's got a cold and is using a pipette to drop vitamins onto his tongue. "How are you feeling?" asks Harding.

"Not terrible," he reports, "but it's something that will definitely affect your voice if you catch it. No high notes."

"Well, at least I could stop singing Zoo Eyes every night," she replies.

Evans didn't sleep much last night.

"I was feeling rough and The Big Lebowski was on, so I just watched that until around 5am." Harding slept through it, though she kept laughing at it in her sleep. When the dream sequence was occurring in the film, Harding suddenly woke up and joined in on the chorus to Just Dropped In (To See What Condition My Condition Was In).

"Except she was singing, 'I just *checked* in to see what condition my condition was in,'" says Evans, laughing.

Their ride to the airport arrives. Evans gathers their luggage together and Harding says goodbye with a hug.

"Please don't over-dramatise me," she says. "I'm just ready for my holiday."

What will she do? "I'll probably just have a couple of months off. If I said what, then it'll become part of this. I don't want to come back and have to answer questions about it. Like, 'How was it? Oh well, turns out I'm not a naturist.'"

One thing she will do, is get her driving licence. She can drive, but she's always afraid she might hurt someone. That's when she loses concentration "and I drive off the side of the road."

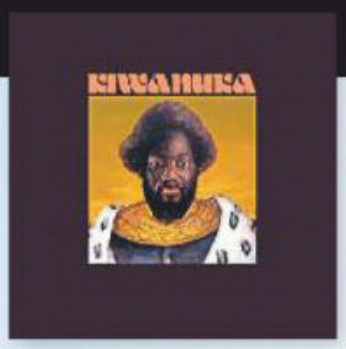
Thinking about it, she decides her mother is partly to blame. She's a very careful driver. Too careful maybe. Lorina's motto, when driving, is "always assume the other person is going to do something stupid." This directly contradicts one of Hannah's own hard-learnt mottos.

"I say keep paranoia on a leash," she reveals. "Because that will also destroy your opportunities, right?"

Harding and Evans leave the Michelberger in slightly higher spirits than when they arrived, mainly because a day off is a day off – even if it does involve international air travel.

Tonight, there will be an early night in a Norwegian hotel. Tomorrow, another show, and then another three weeks of touring before this chapter is closed. Until then, Aldous Harding will be pinning herself to the nose of this vessel, changing lives in ways that can barely be described, one night at a time.

2



Michael Kiwanuka
Kiwanuka

The Backstory: The North London singer-songwriter achieved international success with his second album, 2016's soulful Love & Hate. Emboldened by its triumph, he set out to make his masterpiece.

The Clincher: An exquisite record. From the capped-up self-titled surname on the cover down, this is the sound of an artist confidently coming into his own, a harmonic mix of orchestral ballads, R&B grooves and lush folk.

What They Say: "I've always struggled – waiting for approval. This album reflects a change in that."

Key Track: Piano Joint (This Kind Of Love). *ND*

Michael Kiwanuka: "an artist confidently coming into his own."

This Is The Age Of Kiwanuka

Michael Kiwanuka's career has been marked by periods of agonising insecurity. **Dorian Lynskey** meets him to discuss how he overcame it to deliver an instant classic with his third album, just as it was about to capsize him.

Photography:
Alex Lake

One wintry morning in a rehearsal studio in King's Cross,

Michael Kiwanuka and three of his bandmates are working out how to take his third album, Kiwanuka, to the stage. Eight days away from the first show, in Portugal, it will require the canny deployment of keyboards and sample triggers to recreate the sumptuous arrangements he crafted with producers Brian "Danger Mouse" Burton and Dean "Inflo" Cover. Understandably, the tour budget doesn't stretch to the additional players that raised eyebrows at his record label. Did they really need a harpist? And did there have to be 20 string players? "When you're working with Inflo it's like 1972 again," Kiwanuka says, grinning. "No expense spared."

It's five days since the record rode into the wider world on a tide of rave reviews and it's already beaten the first-week sales of 2016's Love & Hate. "Oh man, it's mind-blowing," Kiwanuka says over coffee in the café of the British Library, not far from the studio. "I'm still processing it because I've never had a response like this. With Love & Hate it was like, 'OK, he definitely means it and has some talent and he's managed to get over the second-record hump,' whereas this one feels like, 'Wow, this is a real artist who we can follow.'" Why that might be, this modest, even-tempered 32-year-old can't exactly explain. "Maybe it was right time, right place," he offers.

Kiwanuka has been most touched by people who say they have listened to the album all the way through. The Canon AE-1 camera resting on the table advertises his preference for tangible, analogue technology over the frictionless ephemerality of the digital. Like most of his favourite albums, it's older than he is. He sequenced Kiwanuka as four sides of vinyl and commissioned the majestic cover portrait from Atlanta artist Markeidric Walker with a view to it being a 12-inch-square work of art rather than icon on an iPhone screen. ("I had a plan to make him royalty," says Walker. "To give him a visual representation of the power of his music.") Like an artisan baker or an oil painter, Kiwanuka is offering something that feels classic without being pointlessly nostalgic, and people want it.

"In this busy world that's pretty cool," he says. "I think when you're in a stressful time, sitting down and doing something else is really important. It can give you the courage to face difficult things." The second song on the album, Rolling, is about the head-fucking velocity of modern life. "I think we're living at breakneck speed and it's dangerous," he continues. "Everything's at the touch of a button. On the one hand the convenience is amazing but as humans we're trying to live as fast as a computer. I think it's killing us. We're always on. We don't even sleep properly. It's causing anxiety and depression and we're about to explode. Rolling is my reaction against that. The whole album is. It's a chance for art to create stillness, away from the phones, away from the WhatsApp, away from the TikTok, away from the Instagram, away from the 'What am I looking like?' Get away!" His voice rises, like he's banishing demons. "I just think we're too fast."

> "Everything's at the touch of a button. On the one hand the convenience is amazing but as humans we're trying to live as fast as a computer. I think it's killing us. Rolling is my reaction against that. The whole album is."

The Kiwanuka LP has led some critics to wish they'd waited a little longer before drawing up their lists of the albums of the decade. It threads 1960s rock, 1970s soul and 1990s trip-hop through the needle of the 2010s

Off the wall: Kiwanuka, Brighton, 12 November, 2019.

with such passion and skill that the world feels like a kinder and more beautiful place while it's playing. But the most striking thing about the response is the love for the man himself. Nobody has a bad word to say about Michael Kiwanuka. He's faultlessly warm and benign company and possibly the only musician in the country who says "flipping" instead of "fucking". His terse one-line cameo in Danny Boyle's Yesterday ("You're fired") was funny because it was so out of character. "He's the most lovely soul," says his long-time manager Robert Swerdlow. "A righteous dude."

At the same time, Kiwanuka's career has been marked by agonising insecurity and feelings of total defeat: the last track on his very first EP was called Worry Walks Beside Me. He's not difficult with anyone else but he was, until recently, hell on himself. It's that fundamental tension which gives the Kiwanuka LP its emotional weight. There's nothing glib about his reassurances; no swerving away from pain.

The story so far has been told before. How Kiwanuka quit the Royal Academy of Music in 2007 and tentatively began performing his own material in-between session work. How he beat Frank Ocean to win the BBC's Sound Of 2012 poll and released his well-liked debut album Home Again. How a subsequent crisis of confidence led him to walk out of sessions for Kanye West's Yeezus and seriously consider giving up on music all together after Polydor rejected his proposed second album, Night Songs. And how he bounced back, with the help of Danger Mouse and Inflo, to make Love & Hate, whose opening track Cold Little Heart became the theme song for Big Little Lies. All's well that ends well? Not quite. What's less well-known is how his insecurity returned with a vengeance midway through Kiwanuka, and how close one of the year's best albums came to never existing.

The process began harmoniously enough. Flushed with the success of Love & Hate, Kiwanuka, Danger Mouse and Inflo kept the ball rolling by reteaming in Los Angeles in May 2017, the week before his US tour. That August, the trio spent another week in »

Electric Ladyland in New York. After a third session, at Metropolis in London in March 2018, they had rough versions of at least half the songs on the album. Then, he says awkwardly, "there was a delay, caused by me."

The cause of this "freakout" was merciless self-doubt. "I was getting all this praise and I felt like it was undeserved," he says. Because he had previously failed without his two "superheroes", he was paranoid that he couldn't make great music without them and needed to prove to himself that he could. So he wrote a dozen new songs alone at home and brought them to Danger Mouse and Inflo, who said they didn't fit with the songs they'd written together. Now he accepts that was true, but at the time? "I threw my toys out of the pram. I was turning up to the studio annoyed." So he downed tools. "I was going to do my own thing, working with another producer who would produce the batch of songs I had."

Hang on. Was he really ready to abandon the whole album? The one that everybody loves?

"Yeah," he says bashfully. "Yeah. It was stupid, right?"

The star of 12-year-old Michael Kiwanuka's bedroom wall, flanked by the Tottenham squad, was Jimi Hendrix. The first records Kiwanuka bought were typical post-Britpop indie fare – Travis, Embrace, The Verve – but it was Hendrix who inspired him to start learning the electric guitar, partly because he was a black American who formed a band with two white Englishmen. Not fitting in was the source of Hendrix's greatness, not an obstacle to it. That made him a lodestar. A black man in a white world.

"If you survive in your culture that's one thing," Kiwanuka says, "but if you're in a world where you don't really belong and you still manage to get to the top, that's another thing. That's how I felt growing up in Muswell Hill. Everyone else was completely different."

In that North London suburb most of Kiwanuka's classmates were white and affluent while he was neither. His father was an electronics engineer who oscillated between contract work and periods of unemployment. His mother was a cleaner who serviced the grand houses in neighbouring Hampstead and Highgate. When times were tough, she worked night shifts at an old people's home, returning home at dawn for the school run and a quick nap before a day of cleaning. Kiwanuka and his older brother had to share a bedroom. Yet his parents shielded him from economic reality so successfully that he never really asked why his friends had big houses and cars and he didn't. "I thought that we just decided to have a smaller flat," he says. "Everything cost the same but we didn't need that much space."

That sounds a bit... naive?

"I was incredibly naive, man! Incredibly. I was happy-go-lucky. I literally thought you just chose your house. I didn't know what income was." He shakes his head and laughs. "I don't know what I was thinking."

Not until he studied jazz guitar at the Royal Academy Of Music did he begin to grasp the mechanics of race and class. When Kiwanuka was 16 he became a jazz buff, with Miles Davis joining Hendrix on the wall. Consumed by music, he neglected his studies so applying to the Royal Academy seemed like the perfect solution. "I could play guitar all day and mum was happy," he remembers. "It was heaven. I thought I'd get a degree and teach but when I got there it was another story. That's when I realised privilege was a thing."

Kiwanuka's impostor syndrome was understandable because he was treated as an impostor. The Royal Academy had the clout to ask professional musicians to tutor individual students and Kiwanuka requested Dave Okumu from The Invisible, another genre-crossing jazz guitarist of African heritage. He still looks stunned when he remembers what the head of the course told him. "He was like, 'Ah no, I think he'd be bored teaching you. He's too good for you.' I thought, 'Well, obviously guitar's not for me, I can't do it.'"

That's awful. Did it make him angry?

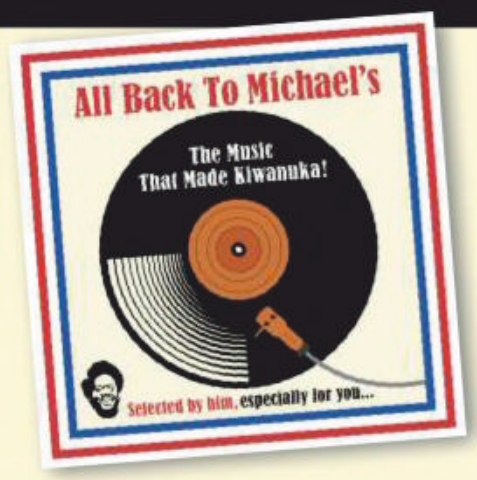
"Yeah, but it was always delayed. When I would tell people how certain teachers would speak, people would get livid and then I'd kind of wake up." He heaves a melancholy shrug. "I always give the benefit of the doubt. I hate conflict, to my detriment. I'll just deal with it myself. I think it must be my fault."

"I always give the benefit of the doubt. I hate conflict, to my detriment. I'll just deal with it myself. I think it must be my fault."

During his second year Kiwanuka started avoiding classes. One day, without telling anybody, he stopped turning up all together because he thought that nobody would miss him. Only later did he realise how many negative judgements he had accepted and internalised, and thus conclude that it wasn't his fault after all. He looks pained when I bring up politics ("I don't want to hear another thing about Brexit") but he thinks that the current horror show has at least exposed some ugly truths that were once glossed over. "Things like racism and xenophobia were quite subtle in the UK. The subtleties are starting to come to the fore. I look back and think, 'Gosh, that was happening to me' but I didn't even notice it." »

GETTY

Kiwanuka: "The best artists are just willing to take the risk..."; (below left) emoting onstage at Salle Pleyel, Paris, 23 November, 2019.



All Back To Michael's!

MK reveals what tracks influenced his Kiwanuka album and made the cut for your exclusive CD*

1 Sharon Jones And The Dap-Kings How Long Do I Have To Wait For You? (2004)

"Her voice is crazy. People who have a genuine, authentic, soulful sound are inspirations to me. I've picked stuff that would influence me to go into the studio."

Written by Bosco Mann (Boscosound Music) BMI. From the LP Naturally by Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings, courtesy of Daptone Records; daptonerecords.com

2 Little Ann Deep Shadows (1967)

"I do love melancholy music. I don't know loads about Little Ann. She sounds like one of those '60s singers who would make singles and then disappear. I'm really into finding gems like that."

(Ann Bridgeforth, Rony Darrell, Dave Hamilton) Rockin' Music ISRC: GBBHN9800086 (P) & © 1998 Ace Copyrights Ltd, licensed from Ace Records Ltd. From the album Deep Shadows – The Best Of Kent Ballads (CDKEND 342); acerecords.co.uk

3 BadBadNotGood feat. Samuel T Herring Time Moves Slow (2016)

"That album [IV] has all the sounds I love from before I was born but it made sense in 2016. I'd never listened to Future Islands until I heard this song. The singer has such a unique-sounding voice: very soulful but very different."

(Hansen, Sowinski, Tavares, Whitty, Herring) Third Side Music (SOCAN) (P). From the album IV (Innovative Leisure); innovativeliesure.net

4 The Future Kind Simon Says (1975)

"That's from an amazing compilation called Afterschool Special: The 123s Of Kid Soul. After the Jackson 5 all these kid bands formed in the hope of getting big. I always look for things that people might not know but sound fantastic."

(Dave Hamilton) Rockin' Music ISRC: GBBHN 1200062 (P) & © 2012 Ace Copyrights Ltd, licensed from Ace Records Ltd. Taken from "The Detroit Funk Vaults" (CDBGPD 251), acerecords.co.uk

5 Gil Scott-Heron The Revolution Will Not Be Televised (1970)

"When I was doing You Ain't The Problem it felt like Gil Scott-Heron: half-singing, half-talking. I thought, 'What would he do?' He gets that feeling like he's just spewing out his thoughts. If I got that feeling I knew I was on the right track."

(Gil Scott-Heron) Carlin Music Corp ISRC: USBB17101029 (P) & © 1971 Flying Dutchman Records, licensed from Ace Records Ltd. From the album The Revolution Will Not Be Televised (CDBGPD 305); acerecords.co.uk

6 Sam Cohen Man On Fire (2019)

"I met him through Danger Mouse and sung on a record he made for the soundtrack for The Man In The High Castle: a cover of Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child. That's how I got into his music."

(P) Figure 8 & © 2019 30th Century Records. From the album The Future's Still Ringing In My Ears (30th Century Records); 30thcenturyrecords.com

7 Flying Lotus Until The Quiet Comes (2012)

"Flying Lotus makes music of today but you can hear the influences of psychedelic soul and Coltrane. I saw the video first, by Kahlil Joseph. I feel that was the start of a new breed of music videos that became art pieces in themselves. That inspired my video for Black Man In A White World, with Hiro Murai."

(Steven Ellison) Just Isn't Music (P). From the album Until The Quiet Comes (Warp Records); warp.net

8 Miles Davis Blue In Green (1959)

"The chords that Inflo came up with for Piano Joint reminded me of Bill Evans and the outro is super-inspired by Blue In Green. Any time you hear Bill Evans play piano there's a beautiful sadness to his chords. Obviously he was a troubled soul. He played his personality through the piano."

(Davis) Copyright Control. First released 1959.

9 Sufjan Stevens Fourth Of July (2015)

"It's a heartbreaking song. So raw. It's the kind of stuff I listen to to teach me how to write lyrics, how to be vulnerable, how to do something so simple but so strong and undeniable."

© 2015 published by Sufjan Stevens Music (ASCAP)/ BMG Gold Songs. © 2015 Asthmatic Kitty Records

10 Thee Oh Sees Sticky Hulks (2015)

"That's going to be my walk-on music. It sounds like a modern-day Procol Harum, with the Hammond and the guitar. But it doesn't sound old. It sounds so present."

(Dwyer) One Eyed Fat Girl Publishing (P) & © Thee Oh Sees/Castle Face Records 2015. From the album Thee Oh Sees Mutilator Defeated At Last (Castle Face Records); castlefacerecords.com

11 Richard Swift Broken Finger Blues (2018)

"That whole album, The Hex, has been on constantly for the past year. Richard Swift is someone I would have loved to work with if he hadn't sadly passed away, way too young. It's a haunting album because it's almost like he knows he's towards the end."

(Swift) DANCECONTESTWINNER (ASCAP) adm. Secretly Canadian Publishing (P) & © 2018 Secretly Canadian, from the album The Hex (Secretly Canadian); richardswift.us

12 Roberta Flack Compared To What (1969)

"Paul Butler, who produced my first album, showed me the First Take album and every time I want to make a record I'll put it on at some point. The way she sings is a cross between folk, soul and jazz."

(McDaniels) Lonport, BMI (P) 1995 WEA International Inc. USAT29500143 Licensed courtesy of Warner Music UK Ltd.

13 Bobby Wright Blood Of An American (1974)

"I'm intrigued by black singer-songwriters. Bobby Wright had a band and the rest of them were drafted in the Vietnam War. All of them died apart from one, so he went in with the remaining musician and wrote this in tribute to his friends. It knocked me for six."

Written by Abu Talib (P) & © 2018 Melodies International Ltd. Licensed courtesy of Melodies International Ltd.

14 Jessica Pratt This Time Around (2018)

"She sounds like Lesley Duncan, Karen Dalton, Sandy Denny... That's probably my Muswell Hill roots coming through because people's parents would put on folk. You want to hear songs that make you want to pick up a guitar and write something. This is one of those."

(Jessica Pratt) Domino Music Publishing (P) and © 2019 City Slang. From the album Quiet Signs (City Slang Records); cityslang.com

15 Townes Van Zandt Pancho And Lefty (1972)

"You know that film Heartworn Highways? It's a killer documentary about outlaw Texan musicians living for songwriting and drinking too much. Townes Van Zandt inspired me to take the craft of lyric-writing seriously. I covered Waitin' Round To Die on a Third Man 7-inch single that Jack White produced. He's one of the best ever to do it."

(Zandt) EMI United Partnership Ltd (P) 1972 Poppy Records & © 2015 Charly Acquisitions Ltd. An Original Poppy Recording, Courtesy of Charly Acquisitions ApS, Licensed from LicenseMusic.com ApS. From the album The Late Great Townes Van Zandt (Remastered Expanded Edition) Charly F 835

*Due to licensing and distribution issues, the cover-mounted CD is not available for overseas or value-pack purchasers.

Keeping the faith: "I missed *[the church]*. It gave me an anchor."

Left with time on his hands, Kiwanuka spent all day at home playing and writing music, beginning the transition from guitarist to singer-songwriter. He also resumed attending church regularly, having drifted away from it in his teens. "In a lot of African families the name Jesus is always in the house," he says. "When times get tough there will be prayers." It was something private, though. Almost shameful. "I was really scared to talk about it because having a faith, especially a Christian faith, was an archaic thing. I wanted to be around the creatives and the forward-thinkers. I didn't want people to kick me out."

As his music career took off, Kiwanuka found that he needed the church again. "I can't explain to you why but I missed it. It gave me an anchor that made me get up in the morning and feel safe." It changed his life in more ways than one. At the hip, youth-oriented church he attended in Kentish Town, the musical director was a woman called Charlotte, who became first his friend, then his girlfriend, and eventually his wife.

But when religion fed into his music, on a song such as 2011's I'm Getting Ready, Kiwanuka thought Polydor would recoil. "I was terrified. I thought I was going to get dropped. When they put that out as a single I couldn't believe it." Later, Inflo convinced him not to hide his faith but accept that it was a vital part of him. "I feel that it's in the music and deep down people may be connecting to it in one way or another," Kiwanuka says.

God makes a striking appearance on the Kiwanuka LP, during the gorgeous, gospel-style call-and-response of I've Been Dazed. "The Lord said to me," Kiwanuka sings, and a choir sings it back to him. "Time is a healer/Love is the answer/I'm on my way."

After Kiwanuka paused the album sessions in March 2018 he needed time to think. "You're dealing with insecurity and ego at the same time and no one can fix that for you," he says. "And you're also dealing with other people's insecurities and egos so you have to really sit down and go, 'What's it all about?'"

He moved to Southampton with Charlotte, got a dog, did some DIY, watched movies, listened to music and turned things over in his mind. As the months wore on, the choice became clear: either give up on the most fruitful creative relationship of his life or get over himself and try again. He got over himself. One day, while visiting Winchester with Charlotte, the penny dropped. He called Inflo then and there and said: "You know what? I get it. If you guys are still up for it, I'm down."

Nothing had changed, Kiwanuka says, except his perspective. »

MICHAEL CLEMENT

Previously, he thought he needed his producers and that was bad. Now he knew he needed them and that was great. "Thank God!" he says. "Aspiring artists want to do everything themselves. There's an obsession with being the next Prince or Stevie Wonder but even they had teams. A great team is difficult to find so if you can find that chemistry, it's something to be cherished."

When the sessions resumed at Atomic Sound in Brooklyn last November, they were the best weeks he'd ever had in the studio. One of the first things he did was write lyrics for album opener You Ain't The Problem, which was a memo to both the listener and himself. It was a productive combination of personalities, with Inflo the diplomat-cum-therapist and Danger Mouse the poker-faced taskmaster.

Kiwanuka says that much of the album took shape during conversations between bouts of recording. Two fundamental topics kept coming up. Firstly, his sense of himself, symbolised by his relationship with the surname that everyone from his teachers to his record label seemed to regard as problematic. Secondly, his position as a black man who wanted to diversify his overwhelmingly white fanbase. Markeidric Walker says that during his first conversation with Kiwanuka about the artwork, they spoke about "empowering tools to bring to our people."

One touchstone in the studio was Fade To Black, the 2004 documentary about the making of Jay-Z's The Black Album. "It shows you what it is to be an artist and make an album," Kiwanuka says.

Mellow in yellow: Michael Kiwanuka, The Brighton Studio, 12 November, 2019.

"We'd have conversations about work ethic: 'Do you really want it? If you want to make a great album, what does it take?'"

Jay-Z became the latest in a series of unwitting mentors. Kiwanuka has met only a few of his musical heroes, such as Bill Withers, who popped backstage at a show in LA seven years ago, and Kanye West. "Everyone thinks that guy is crazy and I don't know if he is," he says of Kanye. "He gave great advice. I just didn't know I was getting it at the time." Most of the people he admires are distanced by fame, or long dead, but he feels their presence anyway, through autobiographies and interviews and documentaries – this spectral legion of kindred spirits. "It tells you how to do it," he says. "If you're stuck, 'What would Miles Davis do?' He dropped out of *[New York's]* Juilliard so when I dropped out of the Royal Academy I thought, 'Well, Miles Davis did it!' It's like you can talk to them even though you can't."

"If you're stuck, 'What would Miles Davis do?' He dropped out of Juilliard so when I dropped out of the Royal Academy I thought, 'Well, Miles Davis did it!'"

Fade To Black addressed another of Kiwanuka's anxieties. He was used to doing his best work when he had nothing to lose. Dropping out of the Royal Academy gave birth to his solo career. Junking Night Songs led to Love & Hate. Now that everything is going swimmingly, what will fire him up next time?

"Jay-Z says it's hard to make music when you're successful because the struggle seeps into the music and makes it pop out," he says. "Comfort isn't necessarily a good thing. The more success you have, the more nice hotels you stay in, the harder it is to make great work, whereas when you're struggling away, there's an intensity to it that is unrivalled."

Perhaps that's where his tendency to self-criticise pays off, rough though it is when he's in the middle of it. No matter how nice the hotel rooms, how warm the reviews, he's always going to struggle with himself. "It's what makes Michael tick as an artist," says Robert Swerdlow. "His capability and his doubt and the fight to push through, that's the mix that makes the music as special as it is." Swerdlow reaches for a boxing analogy. "It's my role to whisper in his ear and massage his shoulders and push him back into the ring. He might have lost a couple of rounds but we can see that he's going to win this."

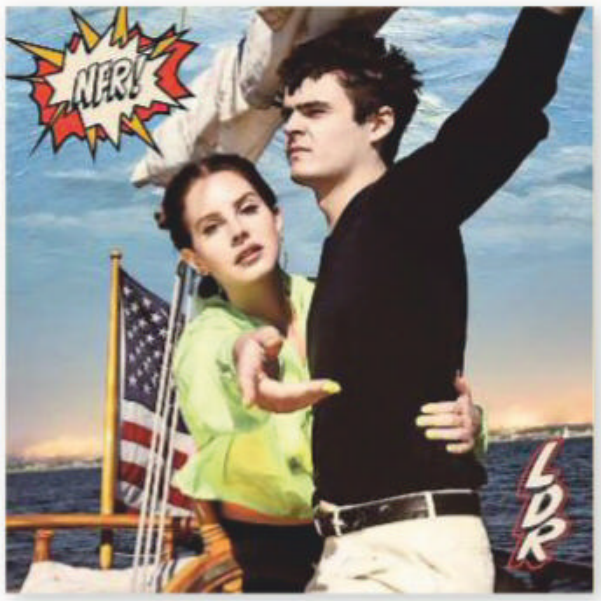
Nine days later, Kiwanuka is sitting on the sofa of his Nina Simone-themed dressing room in the Salle Pleyel in Paris, just around the corner from the Arc de Triomphe. I ask him if he agrees with what Swerdlow said.

"Yeah, 100 per cent," he says with passion. "The true artists that we all love had it. If you're making true art, you don't actually know what's good or bad because you're not using a methodology. You're going into the unknown so the doubt is around you all the time and it's really important. That's what I needed to learn. I thought the doubt was weird and I was supposed to know everything. And now I've realised that the best artists don't have a clue. They're just willing to take the risk."

Tonight is only the second date of the Kiwanuka tour but the rehearsals have clearly paid off because the band has already mastered every song on the album. Kiwanuka is an unassuming presence, with his untucked shirt, cardigan and chronic self-deprecation. "I wish I could speak French," he says. "I'm sorry." But when he sings, head thrown back, eyes shut tight, he holds 2500 Parisians spellbound. There are no glowing phones and no distracting chatter. The world slows down.

When he was young, Kiwanuka said backstage earlier, he used to feel that he was born too late, disappointed by his own era. "You made music just to be seen and make loads of money. I thought that maybe the music back before I was born had a weight to it because it really meant something." He gestured towards the framed Nina Simone albums on the wall. "Music had a message that galvanised people. I feel like now we're in that time again. The world's crazy so this is the first time I feel like it mirrors what it would have been like in the '70s." He looked entirely at peace with his small, still place on the whirling globe. "This is the first time I feel like I was born at exactly the right time."

...Rockwell! rocks: Lana Del Rey's sixth album was "an opulent, deep-diving state-of-the-everything address."



Lana Del Rey
Norman Fucking Rockwell!

The Backstory: After a string of tantalising singles, the American dreamer's sixth album finally came together in the grandest LA style.
The Clincher: Serial killers and Sylvia Plath, Ladies Of The Canyon and Houses Of The Holy, Bacardi and Cherry Coke: these songs hit complex notes of high and low, sour and sweet, Del Rey's splintered, hall-of-mirrors pop opening into an opulent, deep-diving state-of-the-everything address.
What They Say: "It's an album about coming into one's own and choosing to laugh rather than cry."
Key Track: The Greatest. *VS*

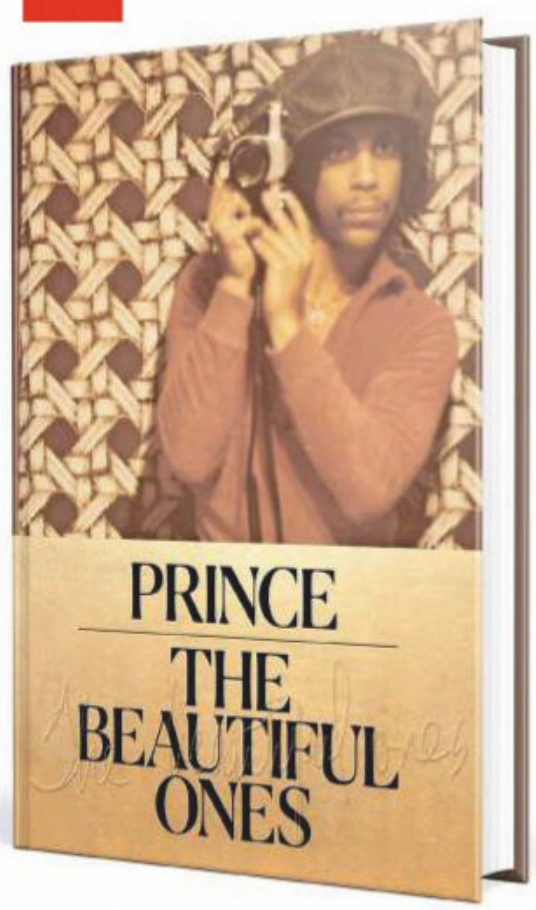
The Music Books Of The Year

By Rupert Howe

1 The Beautiful Ones Prince

(CENTURY)

Rescued from the last days of his Purple reign, Prince's glittering gift 2 U.



Prince's death in April 2016 not only robbed the pop world of one of its greatest talents, it also ensured that plans for him to personally oversee his autobiography would remain tantalisingly unrealised. But while The Beautiful Ones only begins to tell how the precocious son of Midwestern jazz musicians transformed modern music in the early-'80s, it also offers a fascinating glimpse into late-period Paisley Park and its creator's violet-hued alternate reality.

In terms of actual writing it falls to co-author Dan Piepenbring to do the initial heavy-lifting. A music industry outsider who previously worked at literary journal Paris Review, his extended introduction skilfully navigates nervous first contact in Minneapolis (he recalls sitting on his hand to warm it in preparation for the regal handshake) and a clandestine rendezvous in Australia, where his subject was travelling under the alias "Peter Bravestrong" for the Piano & A Microphone tour.

These meetings yield some superb behind-the-scenes detail, such as Piepenbring's invitation to a private screening of Kung Fu Panda 3. Though Prince's own ambitions for the book went far beyond amusing anecdotes, telling his co-author how he wished to celebrate his beloved mother, expose racism in the music business and create a handbook for other creative spirits. The 26 handwritten pages reproduced in facsimile may only cover his childhood yet they reveal how Prince's deep emotional sensitivity became a wellspring for his work, one early memory triggering the reflection that "Some secrets r so dark they have 2 b turned in2 song."

Interspersed with stunning photos, the book turns into something far greater than the sum of its collaged parts.

Add in a disarmingly personal 1977 scrapbook, scrawled lyric sheets from the Controversy era and an outline for what would become the film version of Purple Rain, interspersed with some stunning candid photography, and The Beautiful Ones turns into something far greater than the sum of its collaged parts. Other books will surely dig deeper into the life and the music, but this glows with a special allure, gilded as it is by the touch of the creator himself.

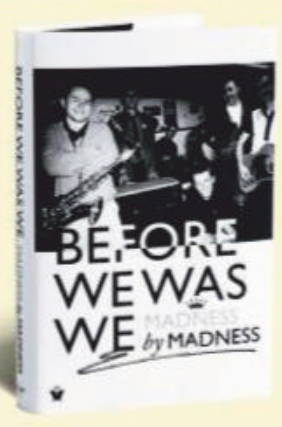
2. High School Tegan & Sara

(MCD)

In its vivid evocation of teenage turmoil, the Canadian pop twins delivered a transcendent coming-of-age story for our times, with psychedelics, all-night raves and queer crushes combining to shape their celebrated future.

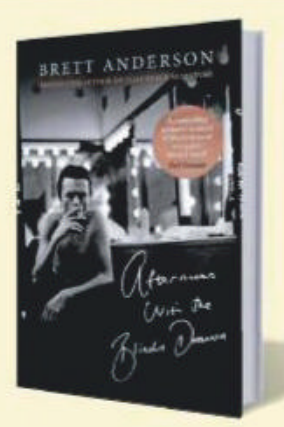
3. Hell Is Round The Corner Tricky (BLINK)

Trip-hop's troubled soul is laid bare in this frank, first-person account co-authored with Q writer Andrew Perry. From childhood mischief to the magic of Maxinquaye, the truth really is stranger than fiction.



4. Before We Was We Madness (VIRGIN BOOKS)

A suitably uproarious oral history of how ska's Nutty Boys came to ram-raid British pop in the late-'70s, with co-writer Q's Tom Doyle deftly marshalling the wild, waggish reminiscences of Suggs and company.



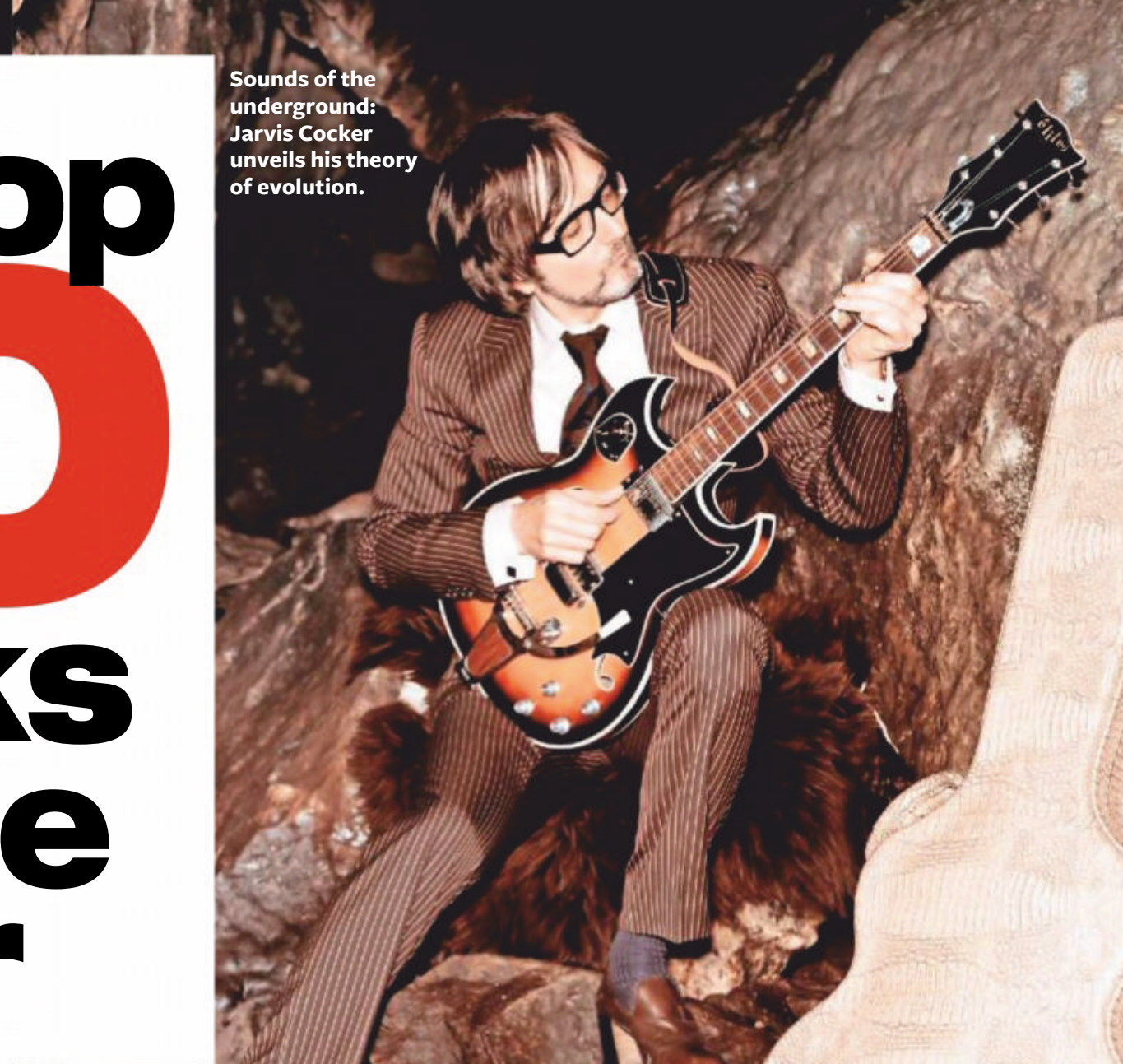
5. Afternoons With The Blinds Drawn Brett Anderson

(LITTLE, BROWN)

Anderson's follow-up to Coal Black Mornings proves equally arresting as Britpop's aesthete-in-chief charts Suede's rise.

The Top 20 Tracks Of The Year

From country-rap mash-ups to teen confessionals and so much more, the top tunes of 2019 had it all covered.



Sounds of the underground: Jarvis Cocker unveils his theory of evolution.

1. Lil Nas X feat. Billy Ray Cyrus, Mason Ramsey, Young Thug Old Town Road (Remix)

ALASDAIR McLELLAN, GETTY

Street-smart: Lil Nas X tops yet another chart.

2. Stormzy Vossi Bop

3. Billie Eilish Bad Guy

4. Slowthai Doorman

5. Ariana Grande 7 rings

6. Lana Del Rey Mariners Apartment Complex

7. Lizzo Juice

8. Fat White Family Feet

9. Róisín Murphy Incapable

10. Rosalía and J Balvin Con Altura

11. Vampire Weekend Harmony Hall

12. Amyl And The Sniffers Gacked On Anger

13. Jarv Is… Must I Evolve?

14. Sharon Van Etten Seventeen

15. The 1975 People

16. Fontaines D.C. Big

17. Little Simz 101 FM

18. Georgia About Work The Dancefloor (edit)

19. Clairo Bags

20. Tame Impala Borderline

The Records Behind The Records Of the Year

The tracks that influenced 2019's best albums.

The tracks that influenced:

Sharon Van Etten

Remind Me Tomorrow

By Sharon Van Etten

Suicide
Dream Baby Dream (1979)

"I first discovered this song when I heard Bruce Springsteen's version, which is kind of funny because I'm from Jersey too. But there's also the Jersey-New York connection and the songwriter-punk connection and that crossover has been really important for me and has helped me find my voice over the years. Suicide's original has the raw-sounding drums and the simple chord progression, which allowed for the vocals to be casual but kind of tough, too. Springsteen's version is still drone-centred, which allows it to feel hypnotic. That overall sonic landscape is what I based my record on: drum beats and drones and a vocal at the centre of the songs."

Portishead
Machine Gun (2008)

"This one's a bit more intense and really sparse when you examine it. There's industrial beats, which you can't tell are from a guitar or drums or synths. It's still very percussive but at the same time there's space, which gives it its intensity. Those textures always intrigue me."

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds
I Need You (2016)

"I was listening to *[Bad Seeds album]* Skeleton Tree a lot when I was pregnant and having my kid. I got to tour with Nick Cave in 2013 and we got to know each other a little bit. I met his kids and knowing what happened to his son *[who died in 2015]* was really heartbreaking because we found out after our tour that that had happened. So to hear this album I found personally inspiring – to hear him and his band come together during this hard time in his life and make such a beautiful record. He was able to talk about love *and* death. There's a vulnerability there that some people might not expect from him."

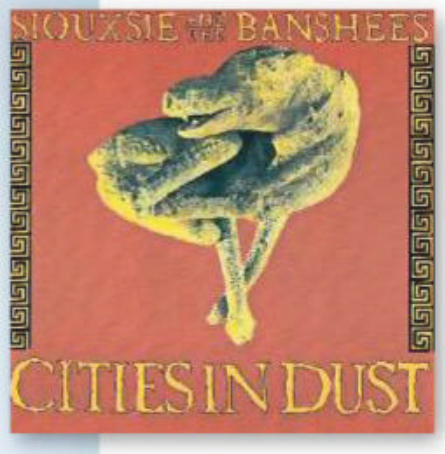
Glass Candy
Digital Versicolor (2007)

"I got turned on to the producer Johnny Jewel from Glass Candy after I heard the Drive soundtrack. I was just getting into electronic music when Drive came out *[in 2011]* and a lot of the time I was driving about on tour or visiting family and it's nice to have a soundtrack. This is perfect for that. Really driving chord progression but with raw drum samples and the lyrics are super innocent, basically shouting out colours, so it's kind of creepy but with a smirk, too."

Symmetry
The Magician (2016)

"This is in a similar vein *[from Jewel's soundtrack to Fien Troch's Home film]* but is a bit more aggressive. When I heard this I was really inspired by how they layered all the drums, so it starts with a simple synth progression and then the second layer is just the kick and then the third layer is hi-hat and snare. It got me into the idea of tracking a lot of drums but layering them and making it sound like a full kit but with a weird, syncopated kind of thing. That inspired me to write Jupiter 4 on my album. It was a really nice way to write without being a real drummer."

"Drum beats, drones and a vocal at the centre...": Sharon Van Etten's sonic template for Remind Me Tomorrow.



Siouxsie And The Banshees
Cities In Dust (1985)

"The video for this song was a reference for my Jupiter 4 promo. A lot of the imagery evoked from the song, like shadows and fire, I used like a mood board for being able to perform and to give a direct vocal performance. Siouxsie is mysterious but also tough and definitely someone who I aspire to be like but will never be."

Nine Inch Nails
She's Gone Away (2016)

"The first time I heard this was on the Twin Peaks reboot *[the 2017 mini-series]* and it was *so* bad ass. The drums were so aggressive, like you were witnessing an attack or something, and Trent Reznor has a way where his vocals sound so raw. Even though the brutality of the drums and guitars around him are so powerful he still sounds super up-close and personal while he's delivering that amazing performance."

The Arms Of Someone New
St. Catherine (1985)

"This is from an LP *[Susan Sleepwalking]* which was reissued in the last couple of years. Again, drum machines, drones, hypnotic, with a really gentle vocal that's kind of ambient but has a sense of longing too. When my son was five months old he would react to this and even when I play it now that he's five years old, it'll make him stop in his tracks and he'll start tapping his feet. The only other songs he does that to is Aldous Harding's Fixture Picture and Yellow Submarine. I think it's because it starts off with a drum beat and his dad was a drummer, so it might be ingrained in him." »

Grauzone
Eisbär (1981)

"They're a Swiss band from the early '80s and I heard this song on the soundtrack to children's film My Life As A Zucchini. I was 10 weeks pregnant and in a very vulnerable place – this film tackled a really intense subject about a kid who loses his mother and goes into foster care, then tries to learn how to have friends. At the moment when he's connecting with his friends this industrial pop song comes in and it was really moving."

Fad Gadget
Collapsing New People (1983)

"This was a soundtrack for me when I was commuting from New Jersey to New York, getting punked-up, saying "screw you" to the people who judge you and learning to, as they say, "dance to the beat of your own drum." Listening to songs like this got me beyond the songwriting part and more into the production of the drums and the synths. I've always been drawn to the beats and the tone, and the drive of the voice still being at the centre with all that around it."

GUY EPPEL

The tracks that influenced:

Sleaford Mods
Eton Alive

By Jason Williamson

Sleaford Mods' Jason Williamson: bringing early-'80s soul, trap and a bit of "yobboness" into the mix.

Loski
Money & Beef
(2017)

"It's solid, straight drill, the first wave of it. I love the flow on it and how he raps. That jab of the sparse beats is reminiscent of grime but with drill, it's more refined and minimalist. It's from a dark album that's quite disturbing in a lot of ways."

RV feat. Narsty Kodak Black (2018)

"The guest spot on this from Narsty is brutal. The way in which it flows and how they conduct their raps... it's fucking great. They've achieved this real good piece of creativity. I know they see themselves as this, that and the other, but it's real artistry, I think."

Chaka Khan
I Know You, I Live You (1981)

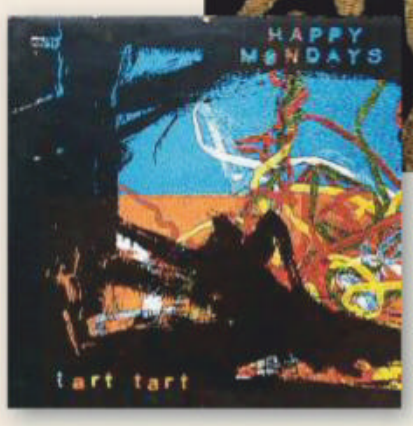
"I really got into this kind of singing and it influenced stuff like When You Come Up To Me and Firewall, which a lot of people hate. Our soundman keeps telling me that he can't listen to that song. I was gonna punch him, to be honest."

Happy Mondays
Tart Tart (1987)

"I've only started exploring them over the past few years. This song is something that really stood out. Shaun Ryder's patter in this song is as if he's reading off lyrics and they're just playing the music, as if he's not rehearsed it. There's a sparsity and minimalism you can feel from the music and it really reminds you of late-'80s northern England, having experienced it first hand."

The Merton Parkas
Face In The Crowd
(1979)

"I got into this just before recording the end of Eton Alive. I just love the yobbo thing and I don't think I'll ever stop loving it. It's got such scope and such a future. There's unexplored territory of yobboness!"



Lil Baby
My Dawg (2017)

"I started getting into trap at the start of 2018 while we were on tour in Europe and I was caning this track from the Harder Than Hard mixtape. Just the beats, y'know, because you can't really understand what he's saying. The video's a help as well. I'm a big sucker for anyone standing around a car just spitting at the camera, I love it! Haha."

The Meteors
Voodoo Rhythm
(1981)

"Thanks to Spotify I got back into the Teenagers From Outer Space compilation, which had all The Meteors' early EPs and choice tracks from their debut album In Heaven on there. Basically, anything with Nigel Lewis *[upright bass/vocals]* on it. They were OK after he left, but it went a bit weird. I really got into that early incarnation of The Meteors, especially Voodoo Rhythm, which I kind of blended with a Happy Mondays influence for Kebab Spider."

Drake
Feel No Ways (2016)

"I got bang into Drake around the same time as Lil Baby. Drake's songwriting is just brilliant. I know he gets lots of writers in, but he sings it likes it's him and he makes it sound effortless. I like the way he goes from that slow-mumble rapping to catchy singing, which is kind of soul-y and reminds me of the early-'80s soul stuff. Obviously his raps are not very PC, full of swearing, then he'll start singing and he'll still have the swearing in. It's great."

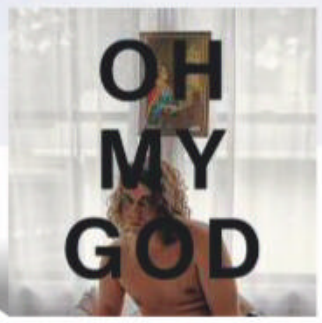
Gucci Mane
Icy (2005)

"This is probably Gucci Mane's best known hit and it's from his debut album Trap House. It's a brilliant song. Again, lots of early-'80s R&B and soul influences in the chorus and you've got this mumbling rap going on. He's from Atlanta, Georgia, like Lil Baby, where all this trap music first came about."

The Cobra Lamps
Known To All (2016)

"This is brilliant. It's Barrie Cadogan of Little Barrie's side-project called The Cobra Lamps, and it's from the self-titled EP he put out. It's really, really good kind of garage-y, late-'60s R&B. It's got that sort of acoustic guitar playing which sounds like it's almost going to fall to bits at one point and then he pulls it back up. I really got into his vocal on this especially, and I think that came out in some parts of Eton Alive."

Shed heaven: Kevin Morby looked to "change it up" on his fifth record.



The tracks that influenced:

Kevin Morby
Oh My God

By Kevin Morby

Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou
The Homeless Wanderer (2005)

"Emahoy's music has become a huge influence on me. It creates a mood all its own. I learned to get busy with my right hand on the piano from listening to her."

Nick Cave
Into My Arms (1997)

"The opening track to one of my favourite Nick Cave albums, The Boatman's Call, is one for the ages. It's the first in his catalogue to have little to no guitars, just as Oh My God is in mine."

Suicide
Ghost Rider (1977)

"Suicide became a huge influence in making Oh My God for their stark minimalism. We were trying to break all the songs down to their parts and leave only what was necessary. Suicide became the biggest reference point for that."

Leonard Cohen
Paper Thin Hotel (1977)

"The album Death Of A Ladies' Man is almost laughably over-produced by Phil Spector. We were having fun in the studio and decided to reach for that bar on Congratulations. We didn't intend for it to make the album, but it fitted among the starkness of the rest of the record."

Carter Family
Keep On The Sunny Side (1928)

"I've listened to the Carter Family throughout the years, and I've always liked the simplicity of their songs. They can be sung by children and adults just the same; they are human songs. I was going for this simplicity with the opening and title track."

Nina Simone
Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues (1969)

"Nina's energy jumps right out of the speakers and she's constantly on my mind when making albums. We were trying to capture something similar to her cover of Just Like Tom Thumb's Blues in my song Sing A Glad Song."

Mulatu Astatke
Yekermo Sew (1974)

"Mulatu's influence can also be heard on my album Singing Saw, but on Oh My God we really ran with him as a reference. There's something spiritual about the way he plays and, with my friend Cochemea Gastelum on sax, we went for something similar."

Leonard Cohen
Tower Of Song (1988)

Like Suicide, this is another example of us referencing an album that focuses on its minimalism and leaves the vocals front and centre and introduces new instruments."

Lou Reed
Fly Into The Sun (1984)

"Another reference to one of our favourite artists in the middle of their career. We were looking for advice on changing it up, this being my fifth record, and not wanting to make an album the same way we had done before."

John Cale
Hanky Panky Nohow (1973)

"We listened to it a few times before starting to record Oh My God, admiring the emotion it was able to capture – even with a chorus that sings the words, 'Hanky Panky Nohow.'"

»

RACHAEL WRIGHT

The tracks that influenced:

Fontaines D.C. Dogrel

By Grian Chatten

Fontaines D.C.'s Grian Chatten: "The Dubliners were the gang we wanted to be in."

Girl Band
Lawman (2015)

"They created a modernist language for Irish culture and Irish youth. It made it seem possible to be Irish without it being traditionally Irish. It's kind of similar to what Joyce did with Irish literature. It was a means of self-expression within Irish cultural heritage without it sounding like we were selling something to people abroad."

The Beach Boys
Your Summer Dream (1963)

"Just the escapist scenery of it. Your Summer Dream was particularly beautiful for us when we started gigging loads. That was how we escaped and grounded ourselves."

The Pogues
A Rainy Night In Soho (1986)

"Just for the line, 'You're the measure of my dreams' that's right at the end. It's the kind of line that can't be topped. It's like when you read a load of authors that aren't F. Scott Fitzgerald and then you go back to reading Fitzgerald and you just feel, 'What's the point?'"

John Martyn
May You Never (1973)

"He's amazing. A lot of his stuff sounds like the things that he fails to say in person, so now you have him on this platform and it all comes out. I heard his ex-wife said that he couldn't give himself enough to her in his lifetime because he gave too much of himself to his music. It's quite tragic, but like a lot of tragic things it makes for some wonderful music. We profit off their loss."

Happy Mondays
Wrote For Luck (1988)

"It's a step into a world of chaos where nothing exists outside of the song and nothing rings true afterwards. Wrote For Luck means something so different to 'I'm fucked up'; it's its own thing. For me it's similar to trad music, it's that drone, like with The Velvet Underground it's a perverted drone, it's so disconcerting. To have something that's quasi spiritual, an ancient musical device with the way someone speaks on the street over the top is fucking genius."

Beastie Boys
Sure Shot (1994)

"For the rhythmic vocals but also the confidence of the drums. The sound of those drums was something that we had in mind when we wrote particular tunes. Also that flute loop, that's fucking heavy – you can feel the breath of the flute player on your face."

Pixies
Hey (1989)

"It's the playfulness. There's a sense of humour and you don't quite know where you are with the chord progressions. It keeps stampeding and rotating around; that was something that we did on *[album track]* Sha Sha Sha."

Bob Dylan
The Lonesome Death Of Hattie Carroll (1964)

"The whole song he's delivering detail after detail and when he's describing the brutality of her murder, it's over a question mark. You're listening to someone who's asking why it happened; they're not sure, they're shocked. The lack of moral resolve is something that influenced *[album closer]* Dublin City Sky."

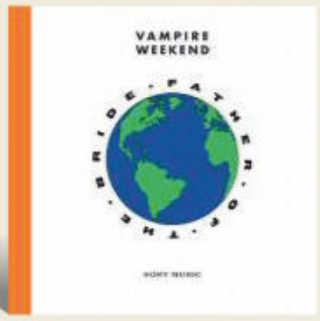
Goat Girl
Throw Me A Bone (2017)

"The reason that we went to Dan Carey to produce our album was Goat Girl's album. What we liked about the production of that record was that there was a level of depth but it was in some filthy fucking water. Dan Carey creates this weird, disconcerting palette of uncertain depth and uncertain shallowness."

The Dubliners
School Days Over (1970)

"They were a massive influence on our first album. Partly for camaraderie. We really liked The Strokes and The Libertines when we were younger, but The Dubliners were the gang we wanted to be in. We always sang School Days Over in the back of the van and whenever anyone is need of a bit of a pick-me-up on tour, we always drag that out – with or without pints. Luke Kelly's voice sounds to me like it's the material from which every other voice was cut and reshaped. It sounds like the voice of God to me. He's the Sam Cooke of Ireland."

GUY EPPEL



The tracks that influenced:

Vampire Weekend
Father Of The Bride

By Ezra Koenig

The Allman Brothers Band Blue Sky (1972)
"I love the double-guitar sounds of the Allmans, the harmonised melodies. On a really basic level, that's the heart of Harmony Hall. There's a virtuosic element to the guitar playing but there's also a lightness that I love."

Jerry Garcia Band Sitting In Limbo (Live In Berkeley, California) (1975)
"It's a 12-minute version of a Jimmy Cliff song. I've always been fascinated by Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead's relationship to reggae. This version is such a beautiful song but I love the way they stretch it out to hear Jerry Garcia exploring the song on guitar."

The Joubert Singers Stand On The Word (Larry Levan Mix) (1985)

"I was showing Mark Ronson some demos and he could tell that in a lot of them, I was going for this house-y piano sound and he said it reminded him of this song. It's a '70s New York dance classic but not a crossover hit. The piano playing is amazing. It's pre-house but it's got that disco piano. It's a very cool, haunting song, a mix of gospel, disco and dance music."

Bob Dylan Jokerman (1983)
"It's a song I became pretty obsessed with as we were working on the record. It's a mix of '80s production, Sly & Robbie's rhythm section and then real old-school Bob Dylan surrealist folk song lyrics. I've been so fascinated by this character of the Jokerman."

Fairey Band Pacific 202 (1997)
"This is a cover of an 808 State song from the first generation of UK acid house. I became obsessed with this version, from an album called Acid Brass, a brass band covering acid house classics. On this album I sing a lot about the mix of organic and inorganic and putting those things side by side and taking ideas from one and putting them onto the other. This is such a great example. It has this cool tension of feeling futuristic but very analogue at the same time."

Haruomi Hosono Talking (1983)
"This is the song that 2021 samples. I listened to it a lot so in a very clear way it influenced the album and became part of the album. It's 15 minutes long and what's cool about it is he originally made it for the in-store music at Muji in the '80s. It's such a cool synth sound, he's a legend and genius."

Hans Zimmer God Yu Tekem Laef Blong Mi (1999)
"By the same logic, I think it's cool to shout out one of the other samples on the album. It's the Hans Zimmer arrangement from The Thin Red Line soundtrack. It's this Melanesian choir singing and there's this addition of classical choral music that Hans Zimmer did. The song itself is this really powerful fusion of musical ideas."

Conway Twitty And Loretta Lynn As Soon As I Hang Up The Phone (1974)
"The album references a lot of country ballads. This is a great example of country storytelling because the whole time it's Loretta calling Conway. He picks up the phone and it sounds like he's talking through a phone, and she's singing to him and doesn't quite get it that things are over. And he's trying to get her to stop singing. I think there's something very sophisticated about a song where you watch somebody go from point A to point B. It's like a little movie. I tried to accomplish something similar on Married In A Gold Rush or Spring Snow."

Nina Simone The Times They Are A-Changin' (1969)
"Nina Simone was truly one of the great interpreters of other people's music, she could take it to a different place. There's this really gripping feel to the way that she performs this song. She takes it to this more epic place and it has this big piano; it feels like this big crescendo."

Underworld Born Slippy (Nuxx) (1995)
"There's an undercurrent of raviness on our record; not on every track, but on a song like Jerusalem, New York, Berlin. We didn't want to make a full-on dance track but we wanted something that hinted at it. Born Slippy is such a good example that takes a long time before any drums come in and is already, the way the vocals and the synths interact, a type of energy." »

Rave on: Ezra Koenig brought a dance element to Vampire Weekend's Father Of The Bride.

GETTY

Weyes to go: the tunes that rocked Natalie Mering's Titanic Rising.

The tracks that influenced:

Weyes Blood Titanic Rising

By Natalie Mering

Gavin Bryars
Jesus' Blood Never Failed Me Yet (1971)

"He's a composer who's very slow and drone-y and beautiful. It's such a beautiful, emotional piece of music that sounds so old and Celtic in this weird way that paired really nicely with my whole Titanic concept. As he's looping the tape and adding string arrangements, it sounds so complex and yet it starts out sounding like a nursery rhyme. It has a beautiful arc."

Dexys Midnight Runners
Come On Eileen (1982)

"This has been my favourite song since I was a little girl and I was always trying to generate that kind of energy inside a studio. What I love is that they're using violins and a lot of different instruments that are more old world but bringing them into a new wave context and the result is one of the most infectious pop songs of all time."

Philip Glass
Glassworks (1982)

"Philip Glass is the biggest pop star of 20th-century classical music. His patterns are really recognisable and they've infused themselves into all other forms of music. I like the idea of taking a gorgeous chord change and putting it on an infinite repeat."

Barry Gibb
Midsummer Nights (2006)

"This is from an album of demo versions of songs that Barry Gibb had written for Kenny Rogers. He made this at his house using a LinnDrum, which is a very cool, groovy drum machine, and there's something so magical about this demo. It manages to be very country and also a pop song all at once."

Joni Mitchell
The Jungle Line (1975)

"Joni Mitchell claims this is a precursor to house music because she is sampling drums and put them on a loop. The song itself sounds so unearthly and strange, it's so ahead of its time in terms of production quality and sound. That was something we were always trying to figure out, to incorporate tape loops and different things into the song structures to give it that kind of quality."

Nat King Cole
Stardust (1956)

"This song is originally by Hoagy Carmichael but I find the Nat King Cole version to be so masterful. There's so much tension. It's the most melancholy love song of all time; it's about a memory of love's embrace, which in our culture has surpassed present love in person. We all seem to be yearning for something that's not there, and this song *[originally from]* the 1920s started it."

The Reels
Return (1982)

"This song is so nautical. It's such a dreamy, epic song with chord changes that sound really abstract and there's a lot of wind and thunder and oceanic sounds; it's like a boat that's traversing across a stormy ocean."

Dion
Only You Know (1975)

"It's such an emotionally poignant song. Lyrically, it resonated with me because it's true; you're the only person who knows everything you've been through and you can't wear a sign on your chest saying, 'Be kind to me, I've been through this, this and this', you just have to swallow it all yourself."

The Kinks
Lazy Old Sun (1967)

"This song is so dark and the chords are so intense. It's like a geological love poem to the sun and has a lot to do with the impending fear of climate change that we experience now. This song is like a dark love song to needing the sun."

Brenda Russell
Way Back When (1979)

"An incredibly arranged pop song with soulful momentum whilst still using angular chords and strange arrangements about somebody who knew a famous performer back when they lived in a small town."

ELLIOT LEE HAZEL

The tracks that influenced:

Mac DeMarco

Here Comes The Cowboy

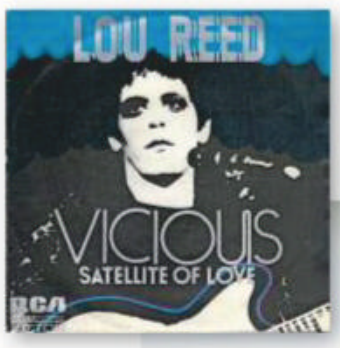
By Mac DeMarco

Graduation
Henry Flynt (2013)

"It's something about the vibe of it. This guy Henry was more involved in experimental, early tape looping music and that kind of stuff but this song has got this beat that sounds like a train coming towards you. It's strange, he's singing like Kermit The Frog. This one set a big theme for me with my album. It put me in the direction for a lot of the weirder shit on the record."

Sly & The Family Stone
Thank You For Talkin' To Me Africa (1971)

"I did try to do the Sly thing a couple of times on this record as much as I could, I'm just trying to write a *[Family Stone bassist]* Larry Graham groove and screw around. It's on There's A Riot Goin' On and I love that song. There's these weird guitars that come in the middle and it's kind of hard to tell if the faders are being brought down or the tape is deteriorated but they kind of just disappear. I love that."



Lou Reed
Vicious (1972)

"I've liked this for a very, very long time. The recording quality is very concise. The arrangements are sparse, nothing sounds huge, the drums sound small, even the electric guitars are small and I like that. It's compact. It's not cute, it's got grit."

Tatsuro Yamashita
Kiss (2005)

"It's from a record called Sonorite. This the driest song I've ever heard. He's made a lot of really lush Beach Boys-y sounding music in the past but this is just a weird little drum sound, this bouncy little keyboard and his vocals are right up in your grill. Very cool."

Arthur Russell
Goodbye Old Paint (2008)

"This is off Love Is Overtaking Me, an album that came out posthumously with country songs and stuff. I wouldn't necessarily say I was listening to this when I was making the record but because I was trying to do this cowboy thing I was looking up old cowboy poems and cowboy songs and it turns out Goodbye Old Paint had already been a song, it's like an old cattleman's prayer."

Paul McCartney
Coming Up (1980)

"Any time I'm recording I end up slipping back to this era of Paul. He's playing all of the instruments, he's pitching his vocals up and the drums are really dry and strange. It's one of my faves. I just kept coming back to this dryness. I like the dryness."

Akiko Yano
Oishii Seikatsu (1982)

"When I was mixing the record I was driving myself crazy, this was one of the songs I kept referencing. I really love the way that song sounds so I'd put this one on and I'd listen back to my mixes and be like, 'Oh my God, I have no idea what I'm doing.' Eventually I just sent it to the record label and was like, 'Fuck this, this is bad for my mental health.' You can keep twisting knobs for ever."

Ryuichi Sakamoto
Andata (2017)

"It's off his latest album Async. It's almost like a funeral dirge piano composition and then a whole bunch of strange effected organs and some weird found sounds come in. There's a lot of the soundscapes and stuff as he walked around with a microphone, finding sounds and appreciating sounds from all over the place. It's cool."

Jorge Ben
Amante Amado (1978)

"His acoustic guitar sounds all fucked up, there's a lot of weird shit going on but it's real. I think just to capture a moment as opposed to a perfect version of something is it for me and this is a good example of that. It's a good song, too. He's tight."

Neil Young
Out On The Weekend (1972)

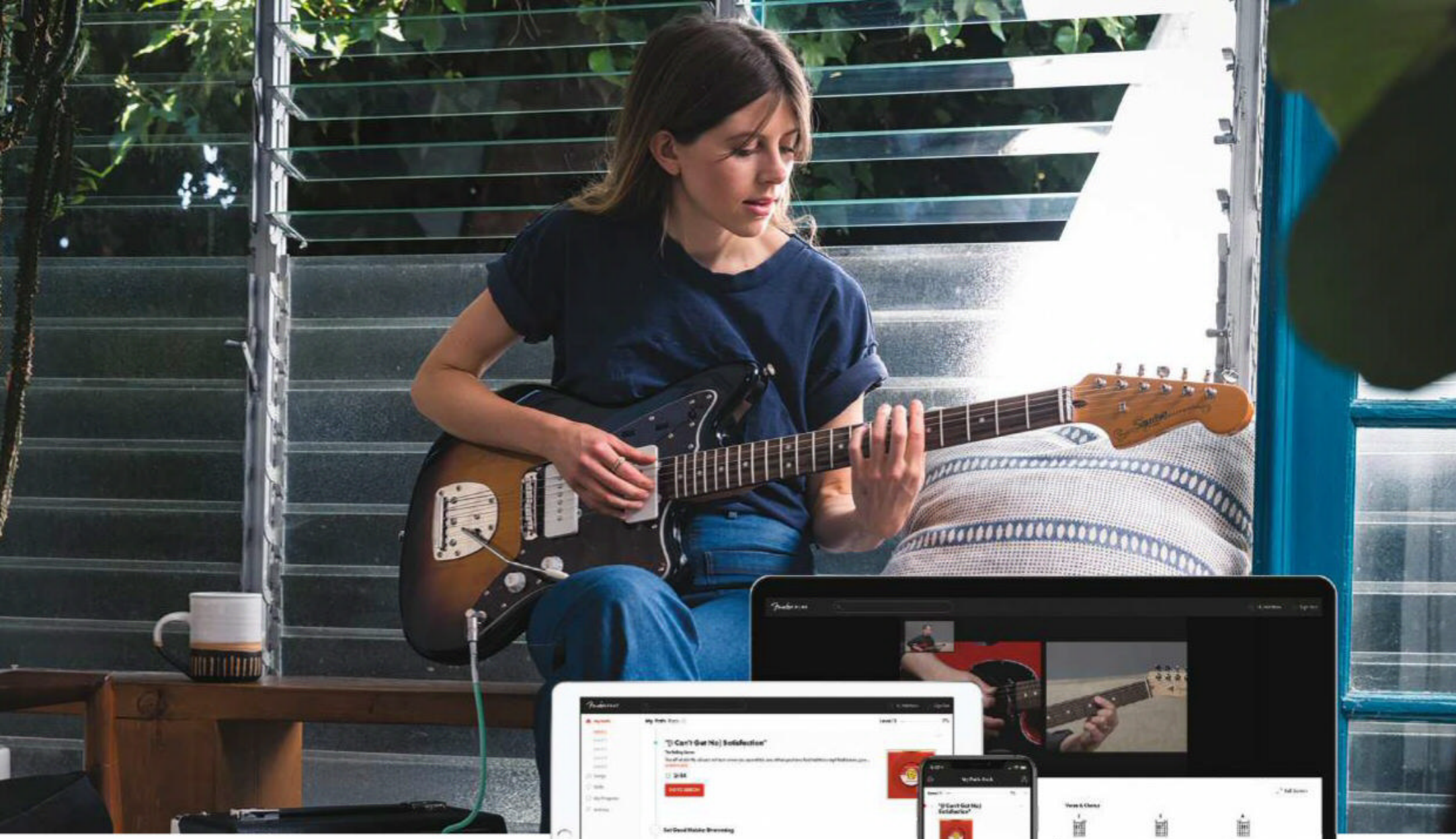
"That record is dry as fuck. I've been trying to make something that sounds like Harvest since I made my second record and I haven't come close with any of them but I appreciate the way that record sounds. It's strange-sounding and they're just doing it live in the barn. It's awesome."

"I like the dryness," says DeMarco, poolside.

Playlists Extra!

Go to Qthemusic.com for the tracks that influenced Serge Pizzorno, Fat White Family and more.

RACHAEL WRIGHT



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Q Review

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST & BEST MUSIC GUIDE

EDITED BY CHRIS CATCHPOLE

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Can the grime titan meet expectations with his first album since 2017?

109 THE BIG MOON
The London indie-rockers may have just made one of the albums of the new year!

113 COURTEENERS
With their sixth LP, it's time to crown Liam Fray and co as the Band Of The People.

HOW WE REVIEW

The Q Review is the definitive music guide. Its hand-picked writers are the undisputed experts in their fields, and they rigorously adhere to Q's world-famous star-rating system.

★★★★★ **CLASSIC**
This is a work of genius. Essential for any collection.

★★★★ **GOOD**
Solid as a rock. You will not be let down.

★★★ **FAIR**
A decent attempt, but not ripe. Investigate at your own peril.

★★ **POOR**
Ill-conceived, under-cooked. Please return to the drawing board.

★ **RUBBISH**
This will boil your blood with fury and disgust.

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

Home counties pop-rap star delights his public with Instagram-ready wonderland.

REX ORANGE COUNTY

BRIXTON ACADEMY, LONDON
26 NOVEMBER, 2019

★★★★

It's hard to imagine a more wholesome evening than one spent in the company of Rex Orange County. Known for his tear-stained Gen Z anthems, the BRIT School graduate manages to combine suave Rat Pack shtick with a family-friendly persona that pitches him as the one-man Beastie Boy you wouldn't be worried about introducing to your mum.

Tonight is the first of three evenings at Brixton Academy and if Rex – real name Alexander O'Connor – is stressed, he doesn't show it. Instead, he strides onto the stage in trackie bottoms and a low-key black T-shirt to monumental, balcony-rattling teenage screaming. Surveying the scene, which is similar to that of a particularly rowdy school disco, he places his hands on his hips in an "aw shucks, me?" fashion and ambles over to his extremely lo-fi set up – two keyboards and a mic. In contrast, no expense has been spared on the first of tonight's lavish backdrops – a made-for-Instagram dreamscape of giant fluffy 3D clouds and a fake lawn covered in plastic daisies. As soon as the curtain drops for its big reveal the crowd know exactly what

Blowing up big-time: Rex Orange County, aka Alexander O'Connor, gives good backdrop in Brixton.

OLIVER HALFIN

to do and, en masse, raise their phones to snap the first of many photos and upload them to social media. The venue's wi-fi connection shudders in appreciation.

Unfazed by the adoration, he jumps straight into 10/10, the positive-pop opener from his new record Pony, which impressively, considering the fact he's still only 21, is also his third album. "I've been so lucky, so far, it's outrageous/I won't complain," he croons, picking up the mic and pootling across the stage's faux-grass and starting to MC, casually shifting aside the singer-songwriter tone and replacing it with a laid-back, hip-hop energy.

The genre-skipping continues in Laser Lights when a flute solo takes the band into nu-jazz territory before skipping into the world of boy bands with the '90s pop-worthy melody of Face To Face, which sees thousands yelling lyrics of angst, anxiety and slightly over-doing it back to him; "She calmed me down that night I freaked out/ We stayed up, I threw up in that house." Then, quick as a flash, it's into rock star mode and he picks up an electric guitar for the bumfluff blues of Never Enough from 2017's Apricot Princess.

It seems exhausting work, so it's no surprise when he sits back down at his keyboards and lets out a small: "Ooooh, my goodness!" Rather sweetly, he goes on to refer to these Brixton gigs as hometown shows, which is something of a geographical reach, considering he's actually from the Hampshire village of Grayshott. You can forgive him such an oversight though, especially when the rest of his band disappear behind the curtain and O'Connor, with just his quavering guitar, launches into the intimate Untitled. Alone, the brittle, bare-boned depth of his music becomes that much more obvious. Soulfully singing lines like, "I don't mind if you hate me/Because baby, if I were you, I would probably hate me too," he deftly places himself in the lineage of emotionally literate one-man bands like Billy Bragg and Jamie T.

SETLIST

10/10
Laser Lights
Face To Face
Never Enough
Television/ So Far So Good
Stressed Out
Pluto Projector
Every Way
Untitled
Hopelessly Devoted To You (Cover)
Corduroy Dreams
Happiness
Never Had The Balls
4 Seasons
It Gets Better
Sunflower
Best Friend
Loving Is Easy
It's Not The Same Anymore
Always

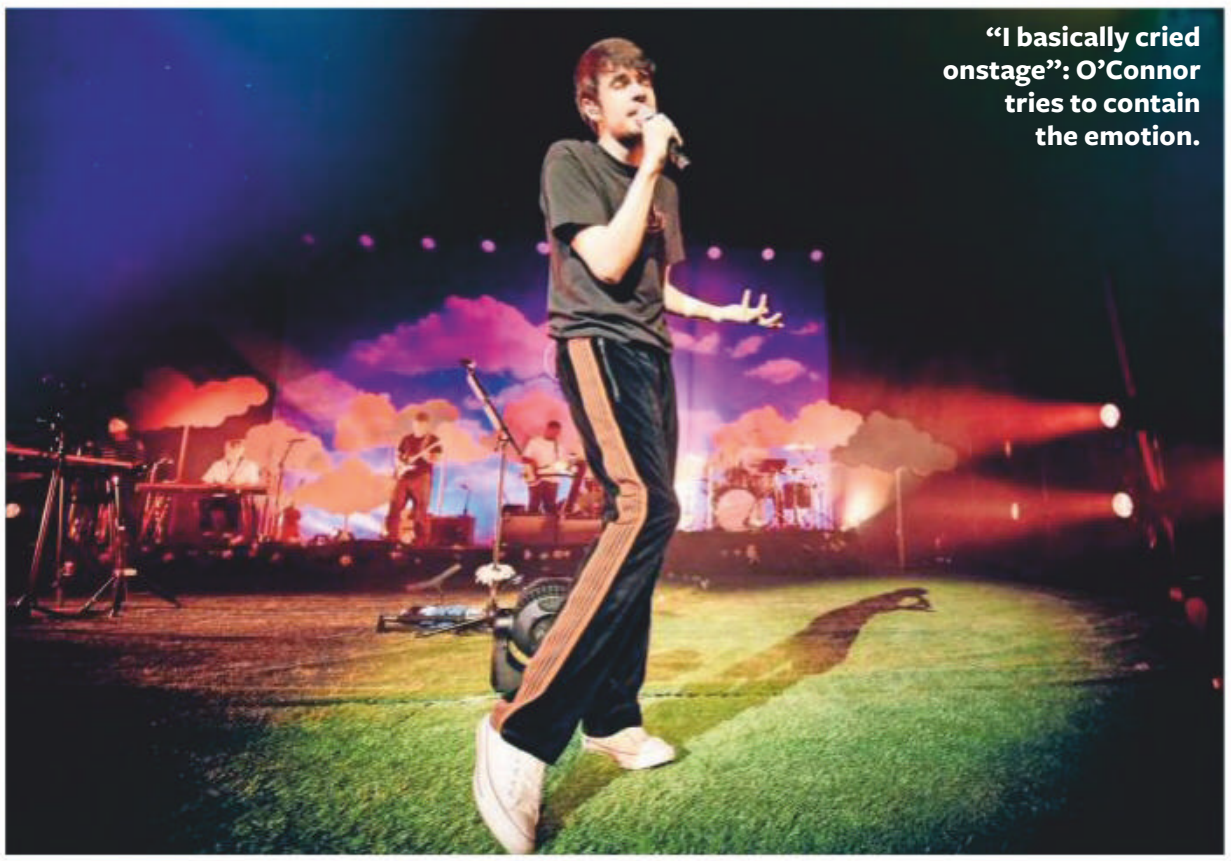
The next big reveal of the evening sees the curtain drop again to uncover a giant inflatable silver pony floating at the back of the stage, lit by disco balls and rainbow lights. Dutifully, the phones come out again as confetti cannons explode and Never Had The Balls comes over like LCD Soundsystem given a Disney makeover before a farewell double act of Best Friend and the extremely smooth Loving Is Easy.

"I basically cried onstage," O'Connor reveals after the show. "I was trying to hold it together real bad and I thought, 'This is gonna sound horrible if I'm actually in tears!' It was just really overwhelming. They were happy, happy tears, absolutely, oh yeah!"

It's been an emotional day. He woke up "terrified" about playing the venue that he'd seen his idol and collaborator Tyler, The Creator at only a couple of months before.

His nerves were misplaced though as O'Connor could arguably have filled one arena instead of playing three shows here. "It was a no-brainer to do three Brixtons," he explains with a remarkable confidence.

"I always want to leave myself somewhere to go – Ally Pally's still there, the O2 is still there. But it's about the intimacy. Each night those people get to be that close rather than having one chance and being stuck at the back." With mega crowds like these, it won't be long until arenas are the only answer. More reason to savour shows like this.
LEONIE COOPER



"I basically cried onstage": O'Connor tries to contain the emotion.

FORCE OF NATURE

UK rap superstar widens his musical scope for second LP.

STORMZY

HEAVY IS THE HEAD

#MERKY RECORDS, OUT NOW

In the two-and-a-half years since the release of his debut album, Gang Signs & Prayer, the Stormzy brand has undergone a significant upgrade. Previously, the South Londoner was merely the grime resurgence's cleverest and most commercial prospect; now he is a veritable titan of British culture. A Glastonbury headliner who steers the wider political conversation, calling out MPs and reshaping the upper echelons as the founder of a Cambridge University scholarship and a new talent-championing publishing imprint.

It has been a rise unlike any other in the hitherto terminally bathetic trajectory of British rap. Perhaps unsurprisingly, blazing trails and breaking new ground has taken its toll on the 26-year-old. His second album's Shakespeare-alluding title nods to the overwhelming weight of success; on it, he grapples with this ascent, ruminating on the pressure he's generated, chronicling his achievements and eviscerating his critics.

Sometimes, all this braggadocio can feel a bit like punching down – is such fighting talk really necessary when you are, by many metrics, the most successful British rapper of all time? – yet it is also the tonal territory where the MC's frothing flow is at its fieriest. Recent chart-topper Vossi Bop is joined by a slew of other bristling self-promotional dispatches. Opener Big Michael is an imperious, swaggeringly stop-start affirmation of his superiority soundtracked by an eight-part brass section and fuelled by the kind of furious wisecracking that has long been Stormzy's calling card. On Bronze he slams his embittered grime elders; on Rachael's Little Brother he declares himself "my country's greatest poet."

It's not a wild assertion, but does feel a bit like a backdated claim. Heavy Is The Head confirms that Stormzy remains notably wiser and wittier than his peers, but it's hard to alight upon material that matches the near-perfection of the bars that made up his breakthrough hits. It's not only his past glories that cast a shadow – his recent activism does too. Aside from a cursory "fuck Boris" on Vossi Bop, the political statements Stormzy has taken to making onstage and social media initially feel conspicuous by their absence. "When I take a stand they say I'm ruining my brand," he admits on maudlin R&B number One Second – a warning he seems to have taken to heart. Yet, it soon becomes clear that there is a subtly politicised seam running through the album, with Stormzy preaching self-esteem in the young, gifted and black vein on Handsome, and community and togetherness on Superheroes.

Like its predecessor, this is an album that oscillates between ominous, icy grime and warm gospel and R&B – yet while the instrumentals can tend towards the workmanlike, there are some pleasing deviations from the norm. Pop Boy is a bubbly, Afrobeats-flavoured party-starter featuring Stormzy at his silliest; elsewhere, there's a nostalgia-fuelled Big Brovaz sample and a millennial-baiting interpolation of the theme tune to children's TV drama Tracy Beaker. Riveting, relationship-based mea culpa Lessons, meanwhile, is proof that Stormzy's crooning does not purely provide a much-needed breather from the intensity of the rapper in full flow.

Heavy Is The Head is a multifarious record, one with sonic scope and perspective that shifts from the myopic to the statesmanlike, the petty to the righteously progressive – and one carried, at times, only by the sheer force of its creator's charisma. It also feels like just one dimension of Stormzy's increasingly diverse career – yet another display of his banter and brains. ★★★★

RACHEL AROESTI

Listen To: Big Michael | Pop Boy | Lessons

What difficult second album?

Three more post-breakthrough albums that aimed big.

Kanye West

Late Registration

(2005)

After debuting his hugely inventive sampling style on The College Dropout, West substantially fleshed out his sound with this expansive, richly layered and staggeringly ambitious rap landmark.

★★★★★

Amy Winehouse

Back To Black

(2006)

The follow-up to the broadly conventional jazz of debut album Frank saw the Londoner rewrite the pop-star rulebook via searingly smart, no-holds-barred lyricism, and that intoxicatingly soulful voice.

★★★★★

Oasis

(What's The Story) Morning Glory?

(1995)

Having won over the country with Definitely Maybe's scrappy but inordinately infectious guitar rock, the Gallaghers returned with a series of swaggeringly sentimental new national anthems.

★★★★★

Crowning glory: Stormzy "remains notably wiser and wittier than his peers" on Heavy Is The Head.

Its Shakespeare-alluding title nods to the overwhelming weight of success.

...AND YOU WILL KNOW US BY THE TRAIL OF DEAD

X: THE GODLESS VOID AND OTHER STORIES

INSIDEOUTMUSIC, OUT 17 JANUARY

Texan art-rockers continue to thrill on album number 10.

After a late-noughties wobble, Trail Of Dead have hit a rich vein of form since 2011's Tao Of The Dead. X, their first album in five years, is another rewarding helping of tuneful art-rock that moves their initial Sonic Youth fixations into far more expansive fields. There are echoes of Talk Talk-like prog stylings on Eyes Of The Overworld and a winning wistfulness to Don't Look Down. Children Of The Sky, meanwhile, builds from an acoustic beginning to a suitably epic climax, and the title track merely serves to underline that they still have few peers when it comes to melodic pummelling. ★★★★

PHIL MONGREDIEN

Listen To: Something Like This | Into The Godless Void

THE COMET IS COMING

THE AFTERLIFE

IMPULSE!, OUT NOW

Another cosmic triumph from the LDN jazz visionaries.

A sequel to Trust In The Lifeforce Of The Deep Mystery released in March, even at just six tracks there's nothing small about the scope of this offering from the paradigm-shifting jazz trio led by saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings. Opener All That Matters Is The Moments is typical of their virtuoso stylistic fusions, a swirling microcosm of electronic treatments, euphoric horn riffs and Joshua Idehen's stirring urban poetry. It's the album's only vocal track, but Hutchings's soloing speaks for itself, whether achingly soulful over the title track's interstellar synth tones or a meditative counterpoint to The Seven Planetary Heavens's percussive roil. A work very much bigger than the sum of its parts. ★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Listen To: All That Matters Is The Moments | The Afterlife

Celestial buddies: The Comet Is Coming (Shabaka Hutchings, centre) – "soulful and meditative".

JAZ COLEMAN

MAGNA INVOCATIO

SPINEFARM, OUT NOW

Veteran post-punk magus' orchestral manoeuvres in the dark.

The notion of an artist of a certain vintage re-recording songs from their back catalogue in a classical fashion whiffs of desperation. To sidestep this, Killing Joke frontman Jaz Coleman has pitched his new album as "a Gnostic mass for choir and orchestra". To his credit, rather than just slip into a tuxedo and rope in a couple of euphonium players, he's gone all in, recruiting the St Petersburg Philharmonic to rebuild late-period Joke anthems The Raven King and In Cythera from the ground up. Yet for all its pomp, circumstance and swirling occult undercurrents, Magna Invocatio's cheerful grandeur evokes nothing so esoteric as a Harry Potter soundtrack. Maybe not the effect he was going for. ★★★

DAVE EVERLEY

Listen To: The Raven King | You'll Never Get To Me

COMMON HOLLY

WHEN I SAY TO YOU BLACK LIGHTNING

DALLIANCE, OUT NOW

Spiky folk-punk introspection from Montreal snags attention.

"You're like a hot supervillain at the top of your game," sings Brigitte Naggar on Joshua Snakes, wielding the double-edged sword she uses throughout her second album as Common Holly. If there's occasional whimsy here, it feels like a necessary balance given the pain poking through elsewhere. It's Not Real is built around disturbing denial ("If I forget it, it's not real") made more unsettling by Naggar's sweet Tanya Donelly-like voice, while Crazy OK snaps like an elastic band around the wrist, part pre-emptive strike, part coping mechanism. Sirens underneath You Dance hint at emotional emergency, but despite its fragility, this LP shows fierce songwriting strength. ★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Listen To: Joshua Snakes | Measured | It's Not Real

GRAHAM COXON

THE END OF THE F***ING WORLD (ORIGINAL SONGS AND SCORE)

RYKODISC, OUT NOW

Essex Americana runs through the Blur guitarist's playful pastiche.

When the first series of The End Of The F***ing World became a runaway success in 2017, it won acclaim for a visual style that conjured the American pastoral from Southern English suburbia. Blur's Graham Coxon pulls off a similar trick as he returns to score the second series, in a soundtrack whose default mode is a kind of Essex bluegrass whimsy. Coxon's vocal – barrel-aged and unusually mournful – is rich on the simmering R&B of Beautiful Bad, but there's a lack of originality here and it struggles to move beyond pastiche. The Francophile ye-ye pop of Bonjour, Monsieur and the frequent nods to Morricone's spaghetti western soundtracks are enjoyable, but too clichéd to be fully charming. ★★★

FERGAL KINNEY

Listen To: Beautiful Bad

RACHAEL DADD

FLUX

MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES, OUT NOW

Free-flowing folk traveller tries to reset the world.

Considering the issues – rising nationalism, rising temperatures – Rachael Dadd addresses on Flux, she sounds remarkably buoyant, bobbing on choppy waves of saxophone or piano. Complex rhythms, knotted arrangements and guests including This Is The Kit's Kate Stables and Rozi Plain don't obscure Dadd's ability to write songs that reach out, though, holding on to what matters. Cut My Roots rejects closed borders of every kind in a defiant festival stomp; the homespun Connected To The Rock reminds humans to plug back into nature. The weave becomes denser on the Gorky's Zygotic Laurie Anderson of Super Moon Machine, but Dadd's mixed message of wonder and worry still shines through. ★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Listen To: Cut My Roots | Beacon | Super Moon Machine

FABRICE BOURGELLE

A NEW PHASE

A fresh, widescreen sound and outward-looking perspective move Brit indie-rockers up a level.

THE BIG MOON

WALKING LIKE WE DO

FICTION, OUT 10 JANUARY

Not content with giving the classic British indie-rock sound a well needed kick up the arse with their Mercury-nominated 2017 debut, Love In The 4th Dimension, The Big Moon have decided to shake things up even further on the follow-up. The London-based four-piece's way with a perfect pop hook is still there, but core writer and vocalist Juliette Jackson has swapped love songs for life songs, bouncing them along a sonic landscape that's now more expansive, darker and that much more intriguing.

Recording in Atlanta, Georgia with Animal Collective producer Ben Allen, Marika Hackman's sometime backing band frequently let jangly guitars take a backseat to throbbing, propulsive synths, with the glistening Your Light lifting them out of the beer-splattered Camden bars and placing them on the dancefloor with LA's MUNA. Even the potent likes of Holy Roller – which lays into a life lived in the digital world, Jackson sighing that "our paradise is golden lit with porno sites and contour kits," – puts their six-string bite through a crisp digital filter. Though it doesn't directly reference the tragedy, the more contemplative, piano-led Dog Eat Dog was inspired by Grenfell and sees Jackson setting out her stall as a songwriter who cares about the bigger picture away from life's day-to-day niggles. It might be coming right at the start of 2020, but this dawning of a new moon could be a real contender for one of the year's best. ★★★★

LEONIE COOPER

Listen To: Your Light | Dog Eat Dog | A Hundred Ways To Land

Q&A JULIETTE JACKSON talks to LEONIE COOPER about big beats and the clarity of raving.

How does the new record move The Big Moon's story on from your debut?

"Our first album was recorded so fast and it was all about capturing our live sound. With this one we had so much more time and we gave ourselves the freedom to be more creative in the studio. A lot of this record is about feeling unstable and seeing a foggy future. Young people are wondering what the fuck they are gonna do with their lives."

There's lots of synths happening too. Why did you want a dancefloor-friendly sound?

"We didn't go full Pet Shop Boys. I'd just been to a couple of raves and had decided sub bass and straight up 4/4 beats were the best and purest thing in the world."

What references did you take into the studio?

"I was obsessed with making things more minimal. I wanted to do more with less. I had been listening to Anna Calvi, Kelsey Lu, Vampire Weekend, James Blake, Georgia, Beyoncé, Kevin Morby and the last Leonard Cohen album. All have their own unique and modern sound but they still make classic songs with choruses and verses, which is what I love."

Why did you want to work with producer Ben Allen?

"He had loads of experience making music with big beats, like for Notorious B.I.G. and M.I.A., so we knew he'd be able to straddle the void between big drums and guitars. Also it meant we got to go to Atlanta and turn the whole difficult second album process into an adventure."

Where's the best place to listen to the album?

"In the car on a long journey. The car is always the best place, isn't it? I wish I had a car."

Rock stars: The Big Moon (Juliette Jackson, second right) – "more expansive, darker and intriguing."

POONEH GHANA

STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Ex-boy band idol finds the fun in going solo.

HARRY STYLES

FINE LINE

COLUMBIA, OUT NOW

The 2017 debut album by former One Direction member Harry Styles was a masterclass in artist repositioning, all '70s soft-rock and acoustic strumalongs that screamed, "authentic singer-songwriter." But it didn't sound like much fun. Moving away from the bouncy pop-rock of old, it was launched by Sign Of The Times, a dreary piano ballad at odds with Styles's image as the latest lustful, impeccably stylish rock imp.

Thankfully, he sounds much more relaxed on Fine Line, even if some of his old habits are harder to shake. Opener, Golden, sets the tone, all lush Fleetwood Mac harmonies and big summery choruses, while the subterranean beats and soft coos of Adore You and Lights Up sound closer to former bandmate Zayn's introspective R&B than Styles's usual vintage musical touchstones. The ballads are an improvement too, with the lilting, genuinely affecting Cherry pleading for clemency, while Falling – ironically not a million miles away from an X Factor-style show-stopper – spills some home truths, Styles's lovely, double-tracked vocals sighing, "There's no one to blame but the drink and my wandering hands."

It's in the album's final third that Styles falls back into ill-fitting rock star mode, cooing, "You can't blame me, darling" on the awkward stomper To Be So Lonely, or, on the prog-tinged, seemingly endless She, creating an older male character that lusts after an unnamed woman. Canyon Moon, meanwhile, harks back to his debut's love of lyrical clichés, all vast blue skies and sun-dappled nostalgia.

Free of the shackles that hobbled his debut, Styles manages to show more of his personality here, especially on the Vampire Weekend-style Sunflower, Vol. 6. It's just a shame he can't quite keep up with his ambition. ★★★

MICHAEL CRAGG

Listen To: Falling | Adore You

Music from big pink: Harry Styles takes it lying down.

DALLAS ACID
THE SPIRAL ARM
ALL SAINTS RECORDS, OUT NOW

Electronic dream-prog from lysergic voyagers.

Dallas Acid aren't the first group to make the connection between deep space and the internal landscape of the body, and the Texan trio's fourth album could soundtrack a journey through either. The Spiral Arm is propelled by waves of blissful dislocation. The analogue futurism of the title track and Silk Rain's corruscating ambience are pitched somewhere between late-'70s Eno and Vangelis's stark soundtrack to the original Bladerunner movie, though Linda Beecroft's drifting whisper gives it a faint core of humanity. The net result isn't unlike microdosing LSD and staring at a moving screensaver: tremendous fun while it lasts, but hard to recall once the tracer lines have faded away. ★★★

DAVE EVERLEY

Listen To: The Spiral Arm | Silk Rain | Emaljets Hav

DAVIDO
A GOOD TIME
DAVIDO WORLDWIDE ENTERTAINMENT/ SONY, OUT NOW

Afrobeats sensation attempts to widen his appeal.

The son of a Nigerian business tycoon who was born, and part-educated, in America, it's not surprising DaVido has long been tipped as a crossover star. Yet despite his husky vocals and smooth assurance, he's still to emulate the success of Drake-approved compatriot WizKid. A Good Time certainly lives up to its title, showcasing an Afrobeats sound designed to maximise global appeal. So while the reggae-tinged Chris Brown hook-up Blow My Mind is a dud, there's plenty to enjoy in effervescent Popcaan collaboration Risky and the way much-streamed single Fall neatly fuses dancehall twerk with jubilant Afro-pop, one of a handful of moments where DaVido's talents combine to match his ambitions. ★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Listen To: If | Risky | Fall

ALEX EPTON
30HA
SA RECORDINGS, OUT NOW

Experimental film score from NY production wizard.

As in-house producer for XL Recordings' US operation, and under his solo alias XXXChange, Alex Epton's CV lists an enviable roster of collaborators spanning Thom Yorke and Spank Rock. Yet even given his cross-genre skillset, this soundtrack to a documentary about post-Soviet Russia is something else altogether. Recorded with cellist Lucinda Chua, Epton mashes up electronics, found sounds and snatches of Tchaikovsky. While Emillio's Blotto edges into the faded sound-world of Boards Of Canada, Swan Lake Pt 2 blurs the ballet score beyond recognition. Epton clearly relishes exploring new territory, though without the accompanying visuals his intentions remain somewhat opaque. ★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Listen To: Bombing | Emillio's Blotto | Swan Lake Pt 2

BILL FAY
COUNTLESS BRANCHES
DEAD OCEANS, OUT 17 JANUARY

Remarkable continuing second act from 76-year-old singer.

Fifty years after the release of his self-titled debut album, and 49 years since he tumbled into obscurity when he was dropped by his label, Deram, enigmatic North Londoner Bill Fay's musical vision hasn't been blurred by those decades spent in obscurity. Attracting fans such as Nick Cave and Jeff Tweedy during his wilderness years, Fay resurfaced with 2012's brilliant Life Is People, a meditative set of songs of deep experience. Countless Branches is more stripped down than that (or 2015's Who Is The Sender?) and foregrounded by piano or acoustic guitar, but the minimalism only focuses the listener on his searching, spiritual lyrics and lovely, time-aged voice. ★★★★

TOM DOYLE

Listen To: Your Little Face | Filled With Wonder Once Again | One Life

FIELD MUSIC
MAKING A NEW WORLD
MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES, OUT 10 JANUARY

Free-ranging social history from Sunderland brothers.

Growing from a project undertaken in association with the Imperial War Museum, Making A New World is a song cycle about the repercussions of the First World War, picking up historical threads as well as musical ghosts (Yes and King Crimson are very much present). A fascinating response to war's seismic impact, it yields such digressive curiosities as Only In A Man's World, a history of sanitary protection to a Talking Heads beat, or A Change Of Heir, exploring the line from army skin grafts to gender reassignment surgery. By opening up to these surprising echoes, Making A New World resonates with hidden meaning and lost connections. ★★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Listen To: Only In A Man's World | A Change Of Heir | Best Kept Garden

Keeley Forsyth: "deeply melancholic."

MARIA ALZAMORA

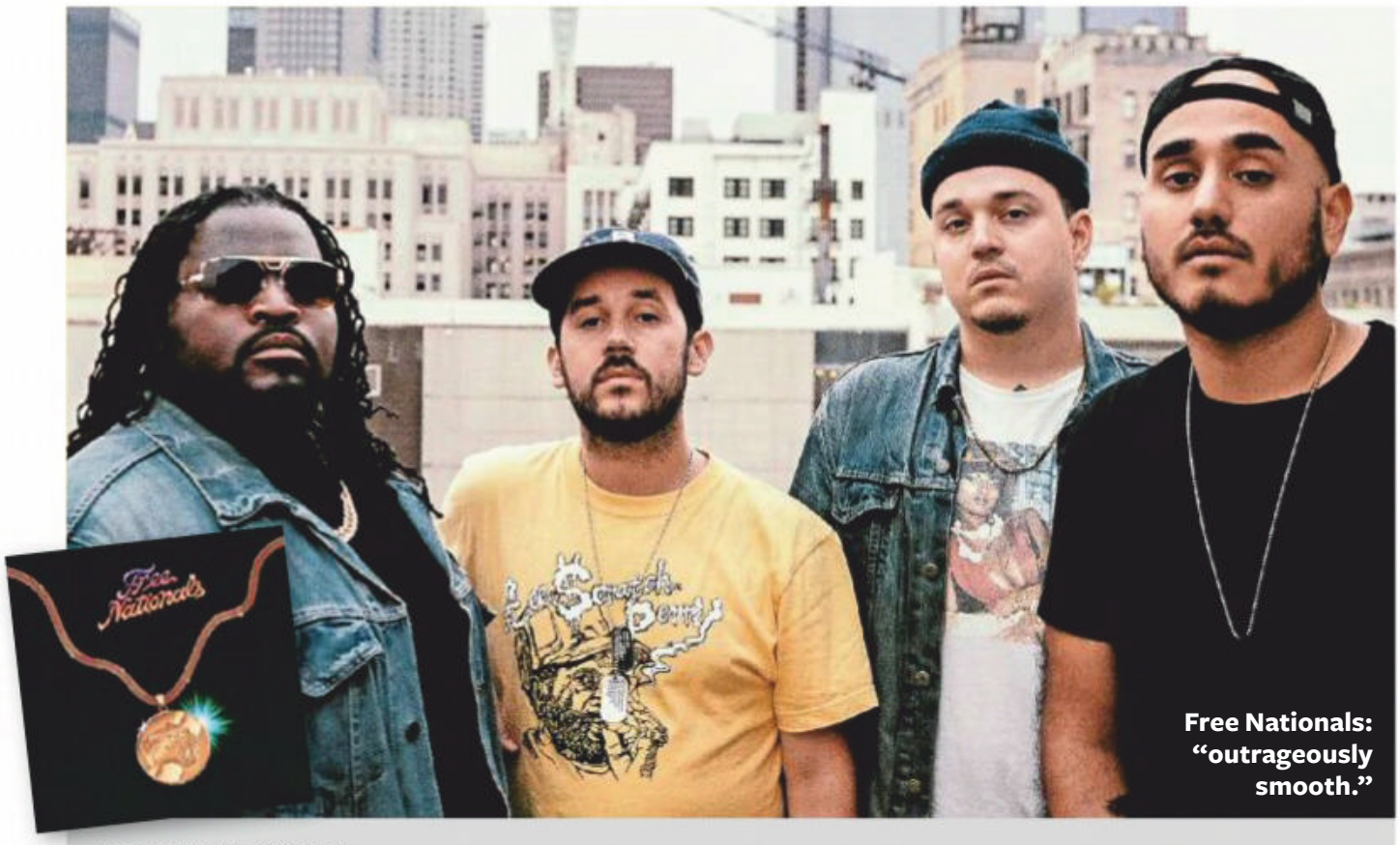
KEELEY FORSYTH
DEBRIS
THE LEAF LABEL, OUT 17 JANUARY

Wildly atmospheric doom-folk from an unlikely new artist.

If Keeley Forsyth seems familiar, that's because she is. This might be her first proper foray into music, but the Oldham native's acting career has seen her steadily on the small screen since 1990s children's television show The Biz, popping up in everything from Happy Valley to Holby City. Her debut though isn't the usual fluff made by soap stars seeking a side helping of pop fame. Instead, this deeply melancholic brand of haunting, sparse folk is as intoxicating as it is unsettling. Over droning, earthy electronics and strings Forsyth plugs into the trad stylings of Shirley Collins and her undulating vocals impress and unnerve on the yearning It's Raining. Before you know it she's echoing like a wailing Cathy across the wiley, windy sonic moors of Lost and venturing into clubby territory on pulsing closer Start Again. Looks like it might be time to quit the day job. ★★★★

LEONIE COOPER

Listen To: Debris | Start Again | Look To Yourself



Free Nationals: "outrageously smooth."

FREE NATIONALS

FREE NATIONALS

EMPIRE/OBE RECORDS, OUT NOW

Anderson .Paak's backing band make star-studded debut.

On Free Nationals, Anderson .Paak's celebrated live band step out on their own – sort of – with a set of soulful, virtuoso funk, an album so outrageously smooth that sex jams nastier than Ginuwine's just float by on the breeze. The four-piece lean on famous friends for treats like Syd's weekend of "underwater" bliss on Shibuya or T.I.'s brash, alpha verse on Cut Me A Break. Stand-out Time blends birdsong with coy affirmations from Kali Uchis and brassy, playful flow from the late Mac Miller. But when it's just the group, there's a little less stardust. Free Nationals says less about the band's identity than it does their taste, skill and curatorial clout – but that's still more than plenty. ★★★★

KATIE HAWTHORNE

Listen To: Beauty & Essex | Shibuya | Time

GIANT SWAN

GIANT SWAN

KECK, OUT NOW

Industrial extremity on the debut from Bristol's menacing outliers.

A succession of much-hyped EPs and oddball live shows have marked Giant Swan as outliers in club music. For this, we have a broken arm to thank, which forced the Bristol duo's Harry Wright away from his guitar origins and towards the DJ decks. No surprise, then, that so many of this menacing debut's ideas come from outside dance music. Take the four-to-the-floor acid of YFPHNT, which builds quickly to a My Bloody Valentine sonic extremity, while the industrial clank of 'I' As Proof is a gorgeous, forgotten Cabaret Voltaire vocal rattling the bars of its cage to be freed. Bristol's rich past lurks below the surface with a red-eyed, claggy dub that thickens like smoke throughout this furiously innovative first offering. ★★★★

FERGAL KINNEY

Listen To: YFPHNT | 'I' As Proof

IDLES

A BEAUTIFUL THING: IDLES LIVE AT LE BATACLAN

PARTISAN RECORDS, OUT NOW

Bristol post-punks' thrilling Paris gig from last December relayed.

With their message of unity and human resistance, there's perhaps few UK bands more suitable to play Le Bataclan – the scene of 2015's horrific terrorist attack – than IDLES. Indeed, at one point during opener Colossus's slow, Birthday Party-esque grind, singer Joe Talbot cuts the music to growl, "We built this album and tour on compassion and love. Show each other respect!" From there on in, the Bristol quintet are at their most visceral and pummelling, charging through the pick of their first two albums as the crowd roars choruses back at them. It's a raucous, righteous performance, one that underscores IDLES' current status as Britain's most vital band. Bien joué! ★★★★

SIMON McEWEN

Listen To: Colossus | Television | Danny Nedelko | Great

LABRINTH

IMAGINATION & THE MISFIT KID

SYCO MUSIC, OUT NOW

Anaemic Kanye impression from ex-pat Brit rapper.

Like James Corden, Labrinth is a British export who blossomed across the Atlantic, ditching middle chart-rap to link up with the likes of Rihanna, Kanye, Beyoncé and Sia. It's a shame, then, that the second solo album from the Hackney-born singer, producer and Simon Cowell protégé is about as far away from the big leagues as you can get. Besides the dark gospel of All Of Us from his soundtrack to edgy teen show Euphoria, this is a collection of muzak-like pop (Misbehaving) and flimsy funk (Sexy MF), punctuated by heavy Auto-Tune and cringy references to Banksy and Martin Scorsese. A mention of Picasso emphasises shared ground with Yeezy, but this is truly a Poundshop Pablo. ★★

HANNAH J DAVIES

Listen To: All Of Us

LAND OF KUSH

SAND ENIGMA

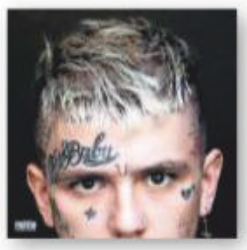
CONSTELLATION, OUT NOW

Complex if sometimes chaotic Afro-jazz experiment.

A prolific figure on Montreal's avant-garde scene, guitarist and oud player Sam Shalabi's Land Of Kush project is a sprawling, 20-plus member ensemble that on their fourth album shape-shifts from free jazz to Middle Eastern folk in a manner that's at once fascinating and, as during the frenzied title track, frankly unnerving. Born in Libya to Egyptian parents, Shalabi makes no attempt to mould Arabic forms for a Western audience. The album's first half is fiercely experimental, Safe Space colliding desert blues with manic improv, yet gradually mellows to include moments of lyricism and harmony, such as the fluid, soul-infused Recuerdo and Ana's mesmerising solo harp. A stirring vision of music given the freedom to roam. ★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Listen To: Broken Maqams | Ana



LIL PEEP

EVERYBODY'S EVERYTHING

COLUMBIA, OUT NOW

A final word on the late American emo-rapper.

Capturing an artist's spirit on one record after they've passed is a tall order, especially given Lil Peep's unique fusion of pop, emo and hip-hop about drugs and depression was still evolving when he died, aged just 21, in 2017. This documentary accompaniment was billed to span his short life and share unheard gems. It proves a partly-successful tasting palette-cum-treasure chest. Previous music shines through while new material inevitably has the scrappiness of work assembled posthumously with Peep's childlike drawl sprawling over markedly lighter beats than the dark pop-punk rap he coined. Yet new track PRINCESS is great, a twinkly electronic love song to remind us of how much of Peep's otherworldly sensitivity he still had to share. ★★★

HANNAH EWENS

Listen To: PRINCESS | witchblades

Courteeners (Liam Fray, centre): "at their best when playing to their strengths."

LYNDSEY HOLT

ENGLAND IS MINE...

Focused and deft: Mancunians take their shot at Band Of The People title.

COURTEENERS

MORE. AGAIN. FOREVER.

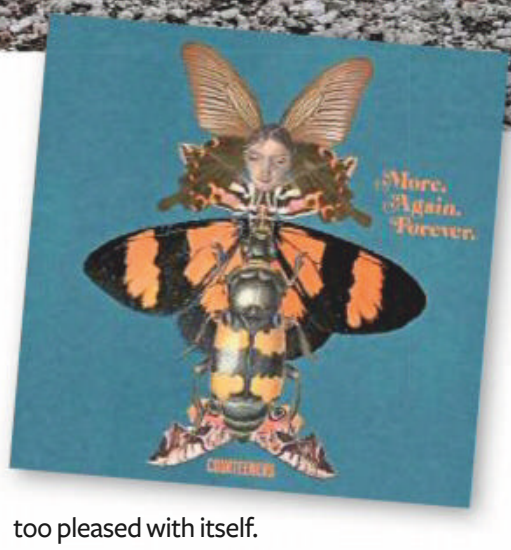
IGNITION RECORDS, OUT 10 JANUARY

Big In The Northwest has been the defining narrative of Courteeners' career, to the point where it has often overshadowed the actual music they make, miscasting them as chippy gobshites dreaming of a golden, Parka Monkey past.

Whether More. Again. Forever. will fix that remains to be seen, but both it and the band who made it deserve better. Frontman Liam Fray has always been a defter songwriter than he gets credit for: Hanging Off Your Cloud may be a grand, pints-in-the-air tune but the sawing orchestration and tumbling drums mask a plaintive sense of loss, while Better Man's early-midlife crisis angst is propelled by a fitting sense of urgency.

There's always been a compactness to Courteeners' albums, but there's a new-found clarity and sense of purpose here, likely the result of Fray's decision to give up booze during the writing process. That doesn't mean he gets it right all the time. Some clunky 2007-vintage funk-punk and self-regarding spoken-word intonation nearly scuppers the title track before an insistent chorus pulls it back from the brink, while the sub-Arctic Monkeys Previous Parties – with its namechecks for Nico, Hunter S Thompson and "Francis Bacon on the jukebox" – would be rejected by Alex Turner for being too pleased with itself.

There's always been a compactness to Courteeners' albums, but there's a new-found clarity and sense of purpose here.



No, they're at their best when playing to their strengths: either rousing (garage-glam stomp Heavy Jacket), stirring (you-can-get-through-this-mate anthem Take It On The Chin), or, as on grandstanding closing ballad Is Heaven Even Worth It?, both. Band Of The People seems like a quaint idea amid the cultural diffraction of the 21st century, but six albums in, it suits Courteeners perfectly. ★★★★

DAVE EVERLEY

Listen To: Heavy Jacket | Hanging Off Your Cloud | Better Man

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for the facts

MADEON
GOOD FAITH
COLUMBIA, OUT NOW

French EDM prodigy finally finds his groove.

Hugo Leclercq, aka Madeon, was EDM's original wunderkind, parlaying 2011's viral mash-up Pop Culture into production work for the likes of Lady Gaga and Coldplay. Since 2015's debut Adventure, however, he's retreated from the spotlight, with this concise, summer-hued follow-up symbolising a fresh intake of breath. While songs like Mania elaborate on Adventure's glitchy house, the overall sound is softer, with the expansive Nirvana and loping opener Dream Dream Dream creating a psychedelic swirl of gospel choirs and echo-laden drum fills. All My Friends' slinky disco strut is off-set by Leclercq's deliciously melancholic vocal. Endlessly experimental, but still tight, Good Faith is Madeon's delayed breakthrough. ★★★★

MICHAEL CRAGG

Listen To: Dream Dream Dream | Nirvana

MURA MASA
R.Y.C.
POLYDOR, OUT 17 JANUARY

Acclaimed Guernsey producer's return confounds.

Alex Crossan's debut may have been peppered with pleasingly offbeat textures and flourishes, but its MO was the production of hyper-modern party-starting tunes. This time, the 23-year-old shrugs off the zeitgeist, instead opting to combine his beats with a raft of disparate styles – often to rather messy effect. Sometimes his curious fusion works, as on the post-punky Raw Youth Collage and the amusingly bratty Deal Wiv It, featuring slowthai. Sometimes it doesn't: No Hope Generation is unpleasant, EDM-fuelled tween-punk. Mostly, though, R.Y.C. just feels confusing, as Crossan lurches between genres (house, R&B, folk) and vocalists (Georgia, Clairo, Tirzah), surrendering his fledgling super-producer status in the process. ★★★

RACHEL AROESTI

Listen To: Raw Youth Collage

OMNI
NETWORKER
SUB POP, OUT NOW.

Atlanta post-punks widen their nervy horizons.

Atlanta's Omni are so post-punk they named their biggest song after Wire, and though their angular influences haven't dissipated on their third LP, they've found a new language through which to convey their frenetic observations on modern life. Take the Morse-code keyboard riff on the brilliant Present Tense, which brings to mind the video game electro of Japan's Yellow Magic Orchestra. There's a pleasing mundanity to their lyrical scope, too – days spent in offices, evenings scrolling across screens. And though the music remains nervy and coiled, vocalist Philip Frobos has never sounded so louche and deadpan – even threatening to croon on the skipalong pop of Blunt Force. ★★★

FERGAL KINNEY

Listen To: Present Tense | Courtesy Call | Blunt Force

JOSH ROUSE
THE HOLIDAY SOUNDS OF JOSH ROUSE
PARTISAN, OUT NOW

Nebraskan songwriter feels festive on 13th album.

Having ventured into new sonic territory on 2018's synth-heavy Love In The Modern Age, the follow-up finds 47-year-old songwriter Josh Rouse retreating under a folk-pop comfort blanket. "'Tis the season to be blue," he croons on Heartbreak Holiday, and while there's enough tinkling pianos and jazz brushes here to delight fans of Bing Crosby, the Yuletide theme feels perfectly suited to a singer who has always specialised in a cosy kind of melancholy. Best of all, Rouse's seasonal amiability also comes with a waspish wit, not least on Easy Man where he sighs, "Some things never change/Maxed out the credit cards." A schmaltz-free Christmas gift for you. ★★★

PAUL MOODY

Listen To: Easy Man | Heartbreak Holiday

ALEXANDRA SAVIOR
THE ARCHER
30TH CENTURY, OUT 10 JANUARY

Alex Turner collaborator steps out of his shadow.

When Oregon singer Alexandra Savior released Belladonna Of Sadness, her 2017 debut co-created with Alex Turner, it sounded more like another side-project from the Arctic Monkeys' frontman than an artist arriving in her own right. This time around, Savior sounds determined not to let that happen again. Taking heartbreak as her inspiration, her crystalline, sparse voice (think Julia Jacklin or even Lana Del Rey) shines on melancholic but dreamy break-up songs and dark, cinematic tracks. Her former collaborator's influence is still present: big bass, nonchalant vocals and minor chords are everywhere, but not centre stage. On The Archer, Savior is a woman in control. She may be heartbroken, but you'll soon be in love. ★★★★

HANNAH FLINT

Listen To: Send Her Back | But You | Crying All The Time

Alexandra Savior: "taking heartbreak as her inspiration."

SESSA
GRANDEZA
BOILED RECORDS, OUT NOW

Seductively unsettling debut from São Paolo pop experimentalist.

With his soft voice, elfin face, cross-blown curly locks and easy way with a pop tune, Brazilian singer Sessa has the look and sound of a pre-teen pin-up. But beneath melodies so delicate they might fly away, there lurks surprisingly little; or all manner of stuff, depending on how you look at it. Although his debut album Grandeza is mostly minimal, it's also frequently discordant. So the lovely Flor Do Real floats by beautifully on his acoustic guitar while a trumpeter tunes up and someone hits randomly at whatever percussion comes to hand, and Sangue Bom exists on nothing more than bongos and maracas until the brass cavalry arrives in the closing seconds. Music to queer your daydreams by. ★★★★

STEVE YATES

Listen To: Grandeza | Sangue Bom | Flor Do Real

ST. VINCENT
NINA KRAVIZ PRESENTS MASSEDUCTION REWIRED
LOMA VISTA, OUT NOW

Expansive remix project re-imagines one of 2017's finest.

Orchestrated by Russian DJ Nina Kraviz, this compilation of remixes doesn't find too many revelatory portals in St. Vincent's fifth album Masseduction, but there are moments that know just how to push open the wormholes in Annie Clarke's flexible, fluid music. All your glitch needs are met by Jlin's nervy, skeletal Smoking Section, while Kraviz has three runs at New York, finally stripping it down to its atmospheric parts. Other highlights include Iceland techno artist Bjarki's off-label Pills and Midland's atomised title track, a train announcement in a language you don't understand. Still, connections are made. ★★★

VICTORIA SEGAL

Listen To: Smoking Section (Jlin Remix) | New York (Nina Kraviz Dirty Master Mix)

TEI SHI
LA LINDA
DOWNTOWN RECORDS, OUT NOW

Canadian-Colombian singer's softly self-assured second album.

La Linda is a mellow, bubble-wrapped update on Tei Shi's knack for intimate R&B vocals and dreamy production. Spacey, twinkly Alone In The Universe is a whispered, witching hour slow-jam and Red Light is a powerful pop song shrunk to fit a minutely detailed doll's house. Even the tongue in cheek, low-key masochism of Even If It Hurts, a retro number with Blood Orange's Dev Hynes, still doesn't burst the bubble. Although at times La Linda feels lukewarm, the emotional heat of crooned lullaby When He's Done (produced by TV On The Radio's Dave Sitek) and the chilly, aloof vocals on Spanish-language track Matando shatter the safety-setting with very real stakes. ★★★

KATIE HAWTHORNE

Listen To: Even If It Hurts | Matando | When He's Done

U-BAHN
U-BAHN
MELODIC, OUT NOW

Eccentric Aussies channel their inner Devo.

From Melbourne but informed by a sleazy glam aesthetic that's as Australian-sounding as their name, U-Bahn join the dots between '80s synth-pop, the sexual frankness of Peaches and Devo's wilful otherness. The standout here, Right Swipe, would perhaps sound like a dazzling mix of early Talk Talk melodicism and jarring synth, but only in the unlikely event of the late Mark Hollis having been in the habit of recounting his Tinder experiences. Damp Sheets, meanwhile, is two songs in one, a sample-heavy funk workout giving way to a coda warning against the dangers of pubic lice. The envelope-pushing gets a bit much at times, Bourgeois and War Of Currents proving a little too discordant for their own good. ★★★

PHIL MONGREDIEN

Listen To: Right Swipe | Damp Sheets | Beta Boyz

VEGYN
ONLY DIAMONDS CUT DIAMONDS
PLZ MAKE IT RUINS, OUT NOW

Oddball humour and odd beats from Frank Ocean collaborator.

Although tighter than his recent 71-track mixtape, Vegyn's self-released debut is still more a mood board than a mission statement. A buzzy, haywire selection from the rising British producer, his tracks are psychedelic and meandering, chasing shinier, stranger sounds before they're even over. Some are cartoonish, like the sing-song That Ain't No Dang Cat! but Cowboy ALLSTAR is as profound a track that samples a whinnying horse can be. He spins webs from nasal pop-punk vocals, radio static and the hum of traffic and, as on the ominous Retro OTW, he can flip the mood in a heartbeat. Still best known as Frank Ocean's collaborator, this album puts Vegyn's enigmatic, oddball humour front and centre. ★★★★

KATIE HAWTHORNE

Listen To: Debold | Nauseous/ Devilish | You Owe Me

LEVON VINCENT
WORLD ORDER MUSIC
NOVEL SOUND, OUT NOW

Berlin-based New Yorker channels uplifting house grooves.

Based in Germany since 2009, Levon Vincent is best known there as a DJ yet his career has been shaped by an ethical outlook far removed from dance music's consumerist excesses – one of the tracks on his 2015 debut LP is bluntly titled Anti-Corporate Music. Recorded during recent club tours, World Order Music's urgent rhythm tracks retain that uncompromising ethos, though now infused with euphoric energy and clever quotation. Flowers For Algernon evokes the sweatbox pulse of '90s NY house, Ratios III's layered repetition nods to Steve Reich minimalism while a thumping tribute to murdered US conservationist Dian Fossey shows Vincent's dancefloor bangers haven't lost their edge. ★★★★

RUPERT HOWE

Listen To: Flowers For Algernon | World Order Music | Ratios III

WIKI
OOFIE
WIKISET ENTERPRISES, OUT NOW

New York rapper pens love/hate letter to the concrete jungle.

Doubling down on the bar he set as part of rap group Ratking, Wiki's second album invites fellow New Yorkers – Lansky Jones, duendita, Princess Nokia – to guest on a record that oozes rugged charm without missing an opportunity to dunk on the city. OOFIE sets the Harlem rapper's tumbling flow over beats both rough and smooth – an intimate, straight-to-camera verse on Downfall jars against the cluttered, introspective nightmare of The Act. Slick, twisted wordplay takes him from "Rugrat to club rat" on The Routine, while brassy beats squeak like brakes on wet concrete on stand-out Dame Aquí, a worldwide brag that cements Wiki as one of his hometown's finest. ★★★★

KATIE HAWTHORNE

Listen To: Way That I Am | Dame Aquí | Freaks

Georgia: emanating a tone of "effervescent wistfulness" on her second album.

JOSEPH CONNOR

OUT ON THE FLOOR

London singer/percussionist stages a return to rave about.

GEORGIA

SEEKING THRILLS

DOMINO, OUT 10 JANUARY

Georgia Barnes first made waves with her 2015 single Move Systems, a spunky, M.I.A.-indebted call-to-arms that showcased her impressive percussion chops (she used to drum for Kate Tempest). It's an attitude that remains detectable on her second album (see: Feel It's infectious, grainy synth line and the riotous electro of Ray Guns), but the dominant tone of Barnes's output now seems to be an effervescent wistfulness – one that pines for both '80s pop and the dying high of club-based euphoria. It's a sensibility that radiates from About Work The Dancefloor, a grammatically confounding but utterly charming ode to nightlife that merges luminous house with the mechanical new wave of Gary Numan, as well as opener Started Out, with its hedonism-as-salvation narrative and sonorously soulful vocal samples.

Amongst the retro-styled nostalgia, however, is a more contemporary and contrarian take on dance music tradition. Mellow, featuring London musician Shygirl, sees the pair tag-team seductively sullen incantations over a whirring constellation of synths, while Ultimate Sailor takes the saccharine melodies of Europop and repurposes them into introspective, pared-back electronica in a way that recalls PC Music as much as Dubstar. Spanning rose-tinted recollection and edgy nowness, Seeking Thrills is an artfully constructed yet instantly enjoyable tribute to dancefloor deliverance in all its forms. ★★★★

RACHEL AROESTI

Listen To: About Work The Dancefloor | Feel It | Ultimate Sailor

MUST BUYS The essential albums of the last few months

Michael Kiwanuka
Kiwanuka
POLYDOR

Michael Kiwanuka's magnificent third album takes its cues from the London singer-songwriter's spiritual forebears, Curtis Mayfield and Bill Withers. And much like those artists, Kiwanuka has created a record full of compassion, generosity and resolute decency. A modern classic.

Girl Ray
Girl
MOSHI MOSHI

Following the jangly, ramshackle love songs of their debut, the North London trio's second LP takes things in a whole new direction, musically at least. So, while Poppy Hankin's uniquely English lyrical perspective remains intact, Girl finds the band revelling in their love of contemporary pop.

Beck
Hyperspace
CAPITOL

With most of the tracks co-produced and co-written by Pharrell Williams, Beck Hansen's latest incarnation takes him closest to breakthrough album Odelay's game-changing mash of hip-hop and blues. There's a gentle effortlessness to this team-up, which gives Hyperspace its universal appeal.

Nick Cave And The Bad Seeds
Ghosteen
GHOSTEEN/BAD SEED

On the Australian icons' 17th album, the loss of Nick Cave's 15-year-old son provides the looming, unignorable backdrop. Yet Cave has extracted sublime beauty from disaster, an achievement that renders this gorgeous, grief-stricken record all the more devastating.

THE BEST GADGETS OF THE YEAR

Over the past 12 months, Niall Doherty has tested the finest and not-so-finest gizmos out there. Here are the pick of the bunch.

WIN THE GADGET OF THE YEAR!
Go to QMail@Qthemusic.com and tell us in no more than 10 words why you should win by 7/1/20. Full Ts & Cs apply.

NAIM MU-SO QB 2ND GENERATION £749

Nice one, marketing department! The audio boffins at Naim have done the hard work creating this speaker, which is cube-shaped and should therefore be about as dynamic-sounding as your mum's new accountant boyfriend but is actually excellent, and all you had to do was anoint it with a catchy name. And you came up with the Naim Mu-So QB 2nd Generation. Good job it's worth the high price for the sonic quality alone. ★★★★★

ROBERTS STREAM 94I £199.99

In a recent episode of The Crown, the camera pans out to reveal the Queen listening to an old-school Roberts Revival. Come on HRH, the Revival is soooo last century! Next you'll be telling us your dishwasher only has one setting! How about you play catch-up with this cutting-edge model from Roberts, which has streaming, Bluetooth and internet radio included. The fact that Philip might start banging his Chainsmokers remixes through it isn't enough of a reason not to purchase, Queenie. ★★★★

AUDIO TECHNICA ATH-SR30BT £89

Audio Technica have monopolised the grey area between cheap headphones that make every LP sound like it was created in a cardboard box and the mega-expensive ones where you can feel the producer's coffee breath tickling your eardrums. Their models always have a great sound without being exorbitant, and you won't find a pair of cans at the same price as the ATH-SE30BT (another catchy title!) that match their sound. It has 70 hours' battery life, too. Win-win. ★★★★

JBL PARTYBOX 1000 £899.99

What do mini-burgers, warm cans of lager cos the fridge is full, having to make a playlist that goes on for hours that's immediately ruined by your neighbour's wife putting on Blue and being gatecrashed by the local creationists remind you of? That's right, parddaaaaay! JBL's PartyBox comes in three sizes, all with a light show built in. We've gone for the biggest one to make sure the people trying to convince your father-in-law that dinosaurs definitely didn't exist are properly drowned out. ★★★

MARSHALL MAJOR III VOICE £149.99

Turn it up to 11 and press play on Whitesnake's second album! Actually, don't do that – it's really important to look after your ears. Marshall's speakers and headphones are always a safe bet. This model has a very good sound and comes with voice control and Google Assistant, giving you the opportunity to unload all that small talk no one else cares about. What, you made pizzas from scratch at the weekend? With a sourdough crust?! Wow, that's amazing. ★★★★

MARCO VITTUR

CHOICE CUTS

THE Q STAFF AND WRITERS' TIPS OF THE MONTH.

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LEONIE COOPER
Q WRITER

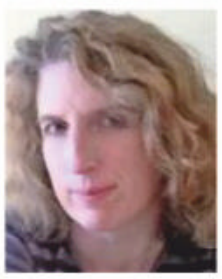
"I cannot stand Red Hot Chili Peppers – apart from when attempting Under The Bridge (the All Saints version) at karaoke – but for some reason I've been desperate to read Flea's 1 **ACID FOR THE CHILDREN** memoir. With a powerful Patti Smith foreword, it's already proving an exceptional read. The same goes for my new favourite fanzine, the psychogeography and folk-horror-obsessed **WEIRD WALK**. Sonically, I'm stuck in a bit of a timewarp after **BILLY BRAGG**'s Islington Assembly Hall full-album gigs got me re-obsessed with ultimate break-up record, Workers Playtime. The greatest album of the '80s? Possibly."

SIMON McEWEN
PRODUCTION EDITOR

"Can't get enough of the crisp, intricate beats on London DJ 2 **BEATRICE DILLON**'s debut, Workaround (PAN, out 7 February). While her fusion of jazzy dynamics and dub-techno textures is decidedly experimental, it's also satisfyingly approachable. Similarly compelling is Berlin-based British producer **BARKER**'s first solo effort, Utility – expansive, luminescent rave which avoids drums altogether. While the always-reliable Analog Africa imprint's latest compilation, **MOGADISCO – DANCING MOGADISHU**, is a fabulous selection of infectious Somali funk from 1972-91."

CHRIS CATCHPOLE
ASSISTANT EDITOR

"Reasons to be cheerful part one: occasional Q contributor and the UK's "41st best stand-up", **STEWART LEE**'s latest live show Tornado/Snowflake is typically scathing and frequently help-I-can't-breathe funny (especially the bit about Alan Bennett's Sharknado). Reasons to be cheerful part two: the new series of 3 **RICK AND MORTY** manages to be grossly offensive and puerile while exploring some quite out-there metaphysical topics, and while it is short on LOLs, the National Gallery's **GAUGUIN PORTRAITS** exhibition is well worth a visit too."



VICTORIA SEGAL
Q WRITER

"A small flare of good cheer for 2020: the return of 4 **CORNERSHOP**, whose bright, shiny home-stamped button badge of a single No Rock: Save In Roll heralds England Is A Garden, their first LP for a decade. Jez Butterworth's strange Druidic brew **BRITANNIA** looks over a very different scene, sending Donovan and Cream to soundtrack a Roman Britain where heads are as likely to be severed as fed. For a gentle form of mind-expansion, there was Two Forms Moving, the gorgeous first track from **SIX ORGANS OF ADMITTANCE**'s forthcoming Companion Rises."

NIALL DOHERTY
DEPUTY EDITOR

"I travelled to Jordan last month to interview **COLDPLAY** and watch them perform in the wonderful setting of Amman's Citadel. The day before, they broadcast two live sets from there for YouTube Originals. I've been re-watching the Sunrise portion lots since – especially the moment where the sun comes up as they perform Arabesque with Femi Kuti and his band. It's perfect. Although I've been a few weeks behind everyone else, I've belatedly discovered how good the new album by 5 **CAROLINE POLACHEK** is. Every winter needs a good winter record to go with it."

MARTIN BOON
SUB EDITOR

"Hallucinatory times call for hallucinatory art, and on that score, Alejandro Landes's debut feature, 6 **MONOS**, surfs the Zeitgeist in some style. Detailing the descent into madness of a teenage band of guerrillas in the South American wilderness, the film is a knuckle-whitening mix of Apocalypse Now and Lord Of The Flies. Back on these shores, I've been loving BBC Scotland's **GUILT**, from TV wunderkind Neil Forsyth, a comedy-thriller that's as gripping as it is hilarious. Meanwhile, **LOOKING FOR THE SUN**, a compilation of sunshine pop producer Curt Boettcher's early work, has taken the edge off the winter gloom."

ROGER SARGENT, NADINE FRACZKOWSKI

WHAT'S ON Absolute Radio THIS MONTH...

Highlights from Q partners Absolute Radio this month include Isle Of Wight Festival highlights and rock'n'roll bust-ups...

It's all Wight on the night: Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil rocks in Absolute's festival highlights.

ISLE OF WIGHT FESTIVAL 2019

Absolute Radio, Christmas Day, 7-10pm

Absolute Radio's Sarah Champion hosts highlights of this year's Isle Of Wight Festival with coverage of live performances from Biffy Clyro, Bastille, George Ezra, James, Keane, Courteeners, Fatboy Slim and Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds.

TRIBES OF THE '80s

Absolute Radio, Boxing Day, 9-11pm

Broadcaster Paul Gambaccini joins Absolute Radio to host a show called Tribes Of The '80s, to mark the 10th birthday of Absolute 80s. The programme will examine some of the musical sub-genres in "the last analogue decade", including new romantics, rude boys and rockers, and their impact on fashion and wider culture. Voices from Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet, Bananarama, Madness, The Selecter, Yazoo, Aerosmith, Def Leppard and Mötley Crüe are among the commentators.

THE SUNDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB

Absolute Radio, 29 December, 8pm

Danielle Perry looks back at 2019, with a few favourite songs – and some tips for 2020. Includes live music from Catfish And The Bottlemen, recorded at an intimate gig at ULU in London for Absolute Radio, plus conversation from one of this year's breakthrough artists, Sam Fender.

(NOT) JUST A GIRL

Absolute Radio, 30 December, 10pm

The title of the song by Gwen Stefani's No Doubt is the first reference point for this new documentary hosted by Claire Sturgess, which looks at what the last 10 years meant for women in the music industry, and what there is to look forward to in the 2020s, after two decades in which women topped the best-selling albums lists. Broadcaster Danielle Perry, musicians Louise Wener, KT Tunstall and Anna Calvi, plus journalist Laura Snapes, are among the contributors.

MUSICAL DIFFERENCES

Absolute Radio, New Year's Day, 10pm

The music industry is littered with some horrific break-ups, often disguised by the rather euphemistic term, "personal and musical differences". Andy Bush takes a sideways look at the best and the worst of the bust-ups, including Oasis, The Beatles, The Clash and Guns N' Roses. There will also be contributions from those close to the scene, including former managers of both Black Sabbath and Fleetwood Mac, whose various intra-band relationships perhaps make them the royalty of rock'n'roll dysfunction.

Absolute Radio THE SUNDAY NIGHT MUSIC CLUB IN ASSOCIATION WITH Q

This month Sunday Night Music Club host Danielle Perry says give music for Christmas.

If you're reading this in the run-up to the big day and panicking about presents yet to buy, fear not, dear friends, as music is the answer (always is!). There are so many ways to conjure up a crowd-pleaser – one of which struck gold for me recently. I bought my god-daughter a briefcase record-player one birthday. So ever since then each Christmas she gets a classic vinyl – second-hand or new – to add to her collection. So far she's had records from The Beatles and The Beach Boys. I think Elvis might be next. When she's older she'll be the coolest kid in town. Or there's gig tickets/merch/online streaming vouchers. Whatever you fancy. Buy yourself one while you're at it. You totally deserve it. And the more we invest in our artists, the more we'll get back. I love that partnership. Have a good one.

■ *The Sunday Night Music Club starts at 8pm.*

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21st - CARDIFF, *Tramshed*
22nd - LONDON, *O2 Forum Kentish Town*
23rd - BIRMINGHAM, *O2 Institute 2*
24th - MANCHESTER, *Academy 2*
25th - BRISTOL, *SWX*
26th - BRIGHTON, *Concorde 2*
28th - PARIS, *Gaité Lyrique*
29th - PARIS, *Gaité Lyrique*

MAY
2nd - BRUSSELS, *Les Nuits Botanique*
3rd - AMSTERDAM, *Paradiso-Zonnehuis*
4th - HAMBURG, *Mojo Club*
5th - BERLIN, *Kesselhaus*
6th - COLOGNE, *Gebäude 9*

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FEBRUARY
12 BURY ST EDMUNDS THE APEX
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14 FALMOUTH SOLD OUT SS PAVILION
15 FALMOUTH SOLD OUT SS PAVILION
EXTRA DATE ADDED
16 FALMOUTH PRINCESS PAVILION
26 BRECON THEATR BRYCHEINIOG
27 PORT TALBOT PRINCESS THEATRE
28 BLACKWOOD SOLD OUT S INSTITUTE
29 LLANDUDNO VENUE CYMRU
MARCH
01 LIVERPOOL GRAND CENTRAL
19 GUILDFORD G LIVE
20 NORWICH UEA
21 MARGATE DREAMLAND
APRIL
29 SHEFFIELD LEADMILL
30 COVENTRY EMPIRE
MAY
01 HOLMFIRTH SOLD OUT EDROME
02 HOLMFIRTH SOLD OUT EDROME
13 HASTINGS WHITE ROCK THEATRE
14 FROME SOLD OUT E & GRAIN
15 AYLESBURY WATERSIDE THEATRE
16 SOUTHAMPTON O2 GUILDHALL
NOVEMBER
04 YORK BARBICAN
05 DUNDEE FAT SAMS
06 STIRLING ALBERT HALLS
07 EDINBURGH LIQUID ROOMS
08 ABERDEEN LEMON TREE
18 ST ALBANS ARENA
19 SCUNTHORPE THE BATHS HALL
20 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
21 MANCHESTER ALBERT HALL
DECEMBER
03 LANCASTER TOWN HALL
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12 SHEFFIELD CITY HALL
14 IPSWICH REGENT
15 OXFORD NEW THEATRE
17 BATH FORUM
19 SOUTHEND CLIFFS PAVILION
20 CROYDON FAIRFIELD CONCERT HALL

NOVEMBER
27 GLASGOW ROYAL CONCERT HALL
SOLD OUT LEICESTER DE MONTFORT HALL
SOLD OUT CARDIFF ST. DAVID'S HALL

DECEMBER
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APR 05 MANCHESTER, O2 RITZ
APR 07 BATH, FORUM
APR 08 PORTSMOUTH, PYRAMIDS
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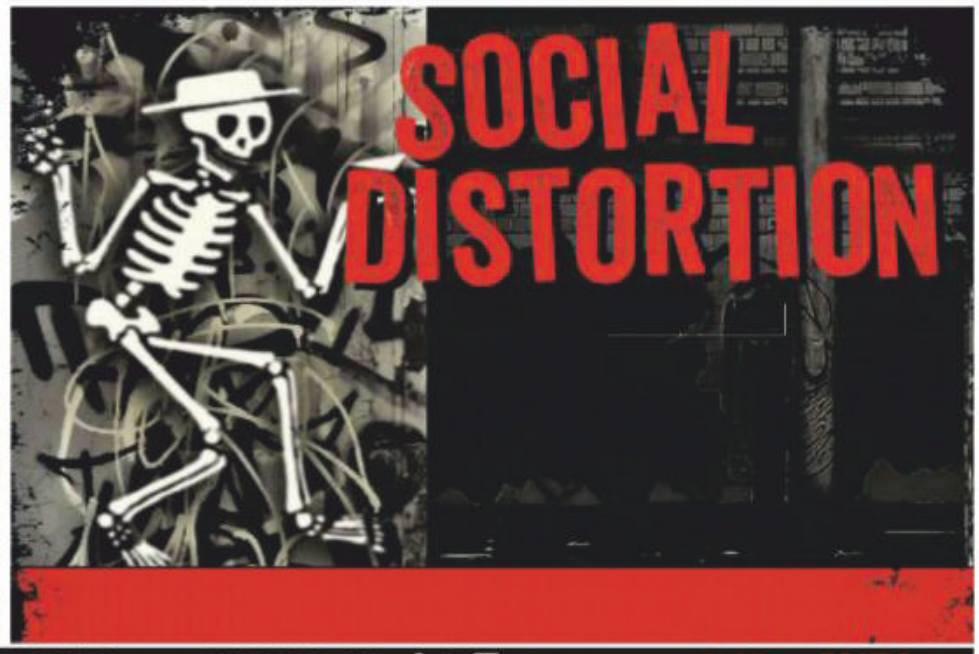

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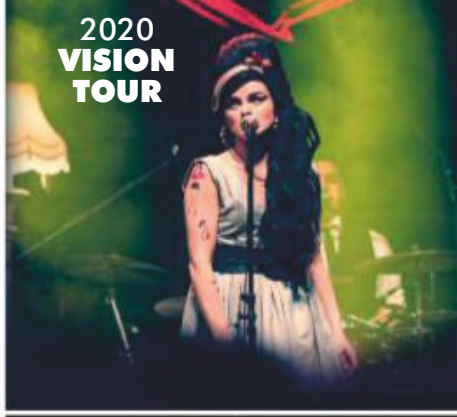

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- Young Carers organisations across the south of England
- Whizz Kids - The movement for non-mobile children
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- Greenfields Specialist School for Communication
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Letter Of The Month

Simply Thrilled, Edders

Dear Q, Just to say, I was lucky enough to meet the great Edwyn Collins *[winner of the Q Maverick gong at the Q Awards]* at an exhibition of his post-stroke bird drawings. There he was, with his wife Grace, and I psyched myself up to say hello. "Hello, Edwyn," I said, "you and your band were the first band I ever saw (Orange Juice, 1982, Cardiff University – I was 14... bouncers were a bit more lax back then)... I remember it so well, best gig ever (gush gush gush, etc)..." He looked at me, paused, and smiled: "Well, I don't remember YOU there!" and then unleashed that amazing "hyuck huck hyuck" laugh.
We salute you, Edders!
Richard Rees, London

Man of the moment: Edwyn Collins with his Q Maverick award.

You've Been Trumped

Dear Q, I must correct Andy Johnson *[Q Mail, Q406]* for his letter claiming that, "Some of your readers voted for Trump and Brexit, in fact the majority of the voters did in both cases..." If you'd bothered to check the facts, Andy, you'd have discovered that actually Trump lost the popular vote in the 2016 presidential election. Hillary Clinton received 2.87 million more votes than Donald Trump (the largest margin ever for a losing presidential candidate!), but Trump received the majority in the Electoral College and various key regions which secured him the presidency (with a little help from those

Q COMPETITION

Win! A pair of Accent 60 Wireless Headphones from KitSound.

Q has teamed up with the good people at KitSound to offer readers the chance to win a pair of Accent 60 Wireless Headphones with on-ear Bluetooth and 35 hours of play time. Such a long charge means nothing can get in between you and your music. Whether you listen on the train or when you train, the Accent 60 is the answer to listening without limits.

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See below how to enter our competition and be in with a chance of winning these superb headphones. Visit KitSound's website **kitsound.co.uk** to see more of their range of speakers and headphones.

This month's teaser:

What 2019 film did Michael Kiwanuka appear in as himself?
Send your answer, including your address, to **captioncomp@Qthemusic.com** or on a postcard to the above address. See below for terms and conditions. Competition closes: **3 January 2020**.

This pair of KitSound Accent 60 Wireless Headphones is up for grabs.

Q405 Winners:

Well done to Izzy Stevens, Goring; Denise Southworth, Manchester; Mike Sheath, Fulford, who each win a pair of KitSound Immerse Headphones.

Ts&Cs: To win, email your answer to: captioncomp@Qthemusic.com or post to the usual Q address before 3/1/20. One winner will be chosen by the panel. The winner will be notified, by email, 7-10 days after the closing date and must respond to Q within 14 days or another winner may be chosen. Q will not respond to questions about its chosen winners but will provide winners' names and the home towns, provided a request is made to the usual Q address and accompanied with a SAE. One entry per person and you must be over 18 and live in the UK. Prize is non-negotiable with no cash alternative. Personal data will be collected by Q and passed to prize provider to process entries. See http://www.bauerdatapromise.co.uk for more details. Ts&Cs apply, see www.bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html. Any queries, email: QMail@Qthemusic.com

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2. Jordan Phizacklea-Cullen, Chichén Itzá, Mexico

3. Simon Pond, Alvor, Algarve

4. Geoff Muggeridge, Sal, Cape Verde

Russians!). So, Andy, stick that in your Trump/Brexit-loving pipe and smoke it. And don't forget, if you don't like Q's supposed "arrogant dismissal" of fact-ignoring people such as yourself, don't read it! Keep up the good work, Q.
Jack Burrell, Scunthorpe

Q Genre Glossary

Hi Q, I want to give Wyn Morgan *[Q Mail, Q405]* a steer on music genres mentioned in Q as he says he's struggling a bit. First of all, "spectral synths" is not a genre, it's just electronic music with a menacing atmosphere. Here's a simple glossary for the rest you mentioned: "angular and awkwardly funky electronica with echoes of disco" = dance music with irregular beats; "virtuoso pop" = crafted, catchy, chart-friendly music; "math rock" = complex indie music; "noughties indie" = indie music released from 2000 to 2009; "French touch" = mid-'90s dance music from France characterised by disco samples and robotic vocals; "Chillwave" = dreamy, retro (ie, derivative/ vintage) pop emerging from the late 2000s. Hope this helps you, Wyn, and that you might appreciate music (and Q) more now that you know. BTW, Q, any chance of a job?!
Sally Cooke, Edinburgh

Q405: Life's a beach for Cali surfing fan Lana.

Q406 Spine Message

Easy, Q! "Yardz" is the character who Stormzy – one of your Q cover stars on the last issue – portrayed in Noel Clarke's 2016 British drama Brotherhood. It was also, in my humble opinion, the best of the "Hood" trilogy. I'll include my address just in case you're feeling generous and want to send me a copy of Stormzy's forthcoming new album. Thanks!
Rudi Watts, via Q Mail

A message to you, Rudi – well done! And Stormzy's new album? It's in the post...

Surf's Up

Dear Q, As a keen surfer I was excited to see Lana Del Rey holding a copy of '70s surf bible Surfing California: A Complete Guide To The California Coast by Bank Wright on your cover. When my hair was longer, I used to own a copy – it was a great reference for surfing the best beaches of the Golden State (Windansea, Trestles, Surfrider, etc) back in the early '80s. Got me reminiscing, and wanting to get my hands on another copy (lost my old one years ago) until I discovered it's going on Amazon for £50 – second-hand! I guess I'll just have to rely on my ever-declining memory. Anyway, respect to Lana for having great taste in vintage surf literature. Kind regards.
Scott Wellman, Boise, Idaho

It's Tricky!

I've been a fan of Tricky for many years so it was great to read his Q Awards interview and "classic album" feature in last month's issue. It's weird to think he's never really got the proper recognition he deserves for Maxinquaye – until now, thanks to Q. And the fact that he seemed so genuinely humbled and happy to have won something was a pleasure to see, particularly when he's had such a tough year. So here's to Tricky and Q magazine, cheers!
Jim Peake, via Q Mail

ALEX LAKE

“Like everyone else living in LA, I’m deranged...” Graham Coxon

The Blur guitarist on living in America, not liking the F-word and embarrassing his kids.

Graham Coxon: “Balls! Somebody’s nicked my effing skateboad!”

What’s the last album you listened to?
It’s going to be very boring and it’d have to be The End Of The F***ing World 2 soundtrack because I had to check it. But I’m normally told what to listen to by my seven-year-old on the way to school and it’s any Beatles LP.

When did you last swear?
Yesterday. I like childish, old-fashioned swear words like balls and bugger. I’m surprised how shocked I am when I hear people use the F-word so much. I think the F-word is a bit boring now and there’s no real need for it.

Who was the last member of Blur to visit your home?
Alex and Dave popped round and we entertained each other by coming up with fake comedic catchphrases. Were we hatching plans too? Hatching nothing, no. If there was something to sit on we might sit on it and try to hatch something but as yet there’s nothing to sit on.

When did you last speak to Damon?
I speak with him all the time, telekinetically. That’s the wrong word, isn’t it? That would mean that I’d move Damon around and we could have a chat. Nice idea. Not for a bit, but the thing with Damon and I is that we’ll probably give each other a moment’s thought every few days and if we feel something in the air that’s not right or that’s good then we’ll drop a line.

When did you last miss drinking alcohol?
I get a millisecond of it probably every few days but it is very easy to overcome. I just say to myself, “Think about what it was really like” and then it disappears.

When did you last embarrass your kids?
I do that constantly and I enjoy it. I used to do it with my eldest, Pepper, a lot walking around Sainsbury’s in Camden. I would just sing loudly and operatically and then she’d hit me. But I can’t embarrass my younger one, my seven-year-old, because she just loves it too much and gets a big thrill out of me being silly because she is the same.

When was the last time you fell off your skateboard?
That’d be a few weeks ago when I went up the park here in Los Angeles, near where I live. I would’ve come off and probably done a groovy roll or something. I’m living in LA for a little bit but since I’ve been here I’ve been pretty much just working on TV stuff, but there’s other things in the pipeline, too. Like everyone else living here, I’m deranged. The traffic and everything else has driven me crazy!

When did you last step in dog shit?
Probably in the back garden a year or so ago in London. I have two dogs, Frankie and Birdie, Jack Russells, but they’re living with friends at the moment. It would’ve been in autumn when there was a lot of leaf coverage.

What was the last meal you cooked which you were really proud of?
It would’ve been a chickpea/potato curry, a kind of a Thai-style thing with some basil fried rice and cucumber salad. But I have so little time to cook nowadays that I don’t even eat sandwiches, I just eat the different parts which make up a sandwich and hope they form a sandwich somewhere along the line, probably in my stomach.

When did someone last shout “Parklife!” at you?
They’ve learnt not to do that because I’d cut them down with my rapier wit or I’d say something extremely personal about their physical appearance. Actually, I can’t remember the last time, it’d be a long time ago. Nobody really recognises me any more and the ’90s was ages ago. I’m sure if I was Damon I’d get it a lot more but I’m just sort of a scruffy, brown-haired bloke like a lot of scruffy, brown-haired blokes so I don’t stick out much.

When did you last think, “the end of the world is nigh!”?
I never have. I believe in scientists and I believe we have to make sure there’s enough time for these extremely bright and progressive young kids to do something about the shit we have caused. I think we have to look for a new planet pretty soon and I know people who are on the case. A new one to ruin! Here in America there’s opportunism, greed and corruption, and the sooner we get rid of greedy criminals who are in positions of power, the better. Q

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